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UNDER THE BAN

TERESA HARMOND STRICKLAND

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A South Carolina Romance

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BOOK I—THE GOOD OLD DAYS.

CHAPTER I.

A FRIENDLY LITTLE GAME OF POKER, AND ITS AFTERMATH.

"Gad, Kendricks, you have taken every single jack pot; you have broken my portable bank, and I think it is about time to quit now, and take a drink all round!" and thereupon a hale and hearty old gentleman, with a deliciously colored nose and cheeks like ruddy winter apples, threw down his valueless cards and arose from the rude bench a sadder and a wiser man. Several other players likewise eyed with lowering brows their empty purses and left the table, whilst the lucky Kendricks delightedly scooped up his easily won cash and calmly buttoned it into the depths of his trousers pockets. He was a clean faced, finely formed young man, with the telltale lines of dissipation beginning to show around his handsome mouth.

"Well, friends," he said; "don't feel too sore; remember the last fishing expedition we were on! Luck was then dead against me, and I even chipped in, my treas-

Penn Cabbs - Feb. 14, 1890

ured diamond ring! I see, Dr. Dan, that you still wear it. It's the fortunes of war!"

The rotund, jolly little doctor winked his merry eye and cried: "I could never think of parting with such a valuable token of your friendship, Kendricks! My wife has thought a great deal more of you, my boy, ever since you 'presented' it to me;" and the other men all joined in his boisterous laughter. There was but one who failed to see the point of the timely joke,—a tall and graceful young fellow who stood sullenly apart, at a little distance. The ominous frown of defeat had not yet left his brow, and his revengeful glances were fixed on the winner.

His gaze was sternly directed at Kendricks, who noticed his humor and cried, "Come, come, Charles, don't feel so sore, old fellow! I will give you another chance to-night, and stake the mare you so much admire! Luck may turn your way! Fortune is a fickle jade!"

"I don't want another chance with you, Kendricks," coldly answered the young man. "You have the devil's own luck, while I—well, I don't flourish as the green bay tree;" and he walked moodily away, evidently hard hit.

Col. Ashmore poked Kendricks in the ribs, and chuckled, "You lucky dog! first fortune smiles upon you, then lovely woman; look out, don't rob Charles of everything. Where is that confounded nigger, York? York! York! I say, come here and fill up these glasses!" For, wine properly followed cards, in this free and easy hour.

"Yes-sa, Marster, I's comin', yes-sa!" and an old black man appeared, peering through the trees, grinning delightedly. "Pete done cotch a fine string o' fish, an' Sam got two or free eels, big as water moccasins! yes-sa!" And he busied himself then, in wiping glasses scientifically and concocting that wonderfully seductive

"mint julep," for which Col. Ashmore's factotum was famous. York was his own special body-servant and had been presented to him by his father on his sixteenth birthday, when he went away to college. Old York had grown gray in his master's service, and he devoutly thought "Mars' Henry" to be the king and ruler of the universe.

As York lifted the demijohn to pour the old red rye into the pitcher, he sang in a monotone, his African invocation to the spirit which all worshiped:

> "Fust, put in the mint when its fresh and green,
> Den, chip in de ice, an' de sugar between;
> Den, pour in de rye, de old red rye,
> An' 'twill tickle you till you almost die!
> Mint julep's de sass dat I like de bes',
> It warms you all up, jes' under de ves',
> It gits in your blood, from your head to your toe,
> Sing ho, for mint julep! an', a ho! ho! ho!"

The white men laughed gayly, as they drew up around the table and joined lustily in the chorus: "Sing ho for de mint julep an', a ho! ho! ho!"

"Come up, Charles, and fill your own glass! Here's to better luck next time!" shouted Dr. Dan, and they all clinked glasses and drank heartily, for "Come easy, go easy" was the rollicking motto. "Fill um up again, ole Marster!" shouted the triumphant York, "an' leave a little drop for your own ole nigger!" Col. Ashmore pressed his own glass upon his faithful slave and filled for himself another, crying, "A toast! a toast! Here, Charles, mount the table and give us a rattling toast!"

There was a chorus of general acclaim as the dark-eyed loser approached. With a flush upon his brow, the young fellow sprang lightly upon the table and, lifting his glass, exclaimed in a rich, ringing voice:

"Here's to the women, God bless 'em! to our mothers, sweethearts and wives!" "Hear! hear!" shouted the excited men, and they joyously clinked glasses and

drank again, and, yet again. The "aqua miraculous" was now getting rapidly into their blood and firing their ardent brains.

As Charles dismounted, Kendricks leapt upon the table, crying in a meaning tone: "A toast! a toast! to the sweetest eyes that God ever placed 'neath woman's brows on earth! to the sweetest lips that ever were formed for kisses! Here's to Carolyn, fair Queen Carolyn!" A crimson wave rushed over young Charles' face, and with a bitter oath he dashed his cup into the face of the toaster, crying fiercely, as he faced him, "Damn your impudence, how dare you name Miss Howard so lightly? If her lips were formed for kisses, you will not have the honor of placing them there! You profligate coward!"

The circle still stood aghast, with uplifted glasses, as Kendricks hurled his own glass full at Charles, and then sprang madly toward him.

Each of the sudden adversaries whipped a ready pistol from his hip pocket, and the men around, now half sobered, dashed their cups to earth and hastily endeavored to part the infuriated rivals.

Cards, wine, and now, woman!

"Gentlemen! gentlemen! Keep cool! I pray you both," shouted Col. Ashmore. "This is not the time nor the place to settle this unfortunate misunderstanding. Kendricks, shame upon you, why, you know better! Charles, you know better also! York, you confounded rascal, you made that last julep too strong!" But the old Southron could not stem the tide of rage. The young hot bloods would not be quieted, but struggled violently for freedom, as four men held each back by main force from the other.

"I insist upon settling this matter right now, and here!" thundered Kendricks. "It is my right!"

"Here it shall be; here you shall pay the penalty of your vile insult!" answered Charles, glaring intensely at his foe. "Gentlemen, the inevitable has occurred! Let

it be settled once and for all time, now. Blood for a blow! You all know the Carolina code!"

"By heaven, you both need the schoolboy's ferrule!" cried Dr. Dan, "and I only wish that I had the right to lay it smartly on. Kendricks, you are offensively drunk. Julian, your dear mother will be waiting for you; think over this whole affair to-night and then settle it properly to-morrow."

"If Charles is tied to his mother's apron strings, I am not, and, I mean to have it out now!" yelled the courageous Kendricks. "Here, Richards, be my second. Choose yours, sir!" and he glared at Charles. "I demand satisfaction!"

"Hastings, stand by me, will you? and you, gentlemen, can all see fair play for both. Dr. Blake, you are fortunately here to attend us; Col. Ashmore, you will readily see it is a just provocation; but, I beg of you all, keep this meeting quiet for Miss Howard's sake," Charles entreated earnestly. All chance of a peaceful issue had vanished.

The planters saw that it was useless to oppose the duel longer, so the pistols were most carefully examined, ten paces at once measured off, and all the details arranged, while Charles pencilled a brief note to his mother and silently gave it into Dr. Dan's care.

"O! Lordy! Lordy! gen'mens, don't kill each udder, 'fore God, hit is er sin an' er shame to stan' up an' shoot one anudder down! Mars Charles, what our Miss Car'line gwinter say? an' your mudder, Miss Ma'y?" "Shut up your mouth, you confounded black rascal!" shouted the portly Col. Ashmore, blowing his nose vigorously with his red bandana, and then walking excitedly up and down. He was, by birth and education, a slave of the code.

"O, Lordy, Lordy! I nebber is gwinter make anudder mint julep outen dat old rye! Marster, ain't I done tole

you hit was enough to make a fellow strike his own daddy? an' to tink I mix it up; O, Lordy, Lordy!"

Col. Ashmore gave the old darkey a vigorous kick, that set him to hugging his shins and praying, with chattering teeth, under his breath.

"Gentlemen, are you ready?" he asked, as he faced about.

"I am!" "I am!" came simultaneously from the rivals.

They stood as sharply outlined as bronze statues, and faced each other with defiant eyes ready for death.

"One— Two— Three— Fire!" the old Colonel's solemn voice intoned.

Two heavy reports rang out sharp on the evening air, and a cloud of smoke hid the two combatants for a moment; when it had slowly cleared away, Julian Charles lay outstretched upon the ground there before them, with the blood flowing slowly from a wound apparently in his breast, whilst the stern Kendricks stood upright and unharmed. All the witnesses made a frantic rush toward Charles.

The doctor was now supporting him and feeling cautiously for his heart, whilst the grief-stricken Col. Ashmore forced a few drops of brandy through the young sufferer's compressed lips, and old York, hovering near, wrung his hands and prayed. The sudden quarrel had its bloody sequel.

"Is he dead?" calmly called out Kendricks.

"It is not your fault that he is not, sir!" thundered the enraged Col. Ashmore. "Luck is all for you this time. Look out, sir! lucky in cards unlucky in love! Your time will come!"

"Is he coming to, Doctor?" asked Hastings, anxiously, as he chafed Julian's hands, and bent affectionately over him. The wounded man gasped and feebly moaned. "Yes, he'll come around all right in time. The bullet went through the muscles of his shoulder, and fortunately only grazed his left lung. With care and good nurs-

ing I will set him on his feet again. I hope he will have better sense next time."

Kendricks and his second hastily called to their men for their horses to be saddled, and soon rode sullenly away with no adieux. The doctor prepared his own carriage for the wounded man, and he and Col. Ashmore accompanied him slowly homeward.

The little friendly game had fanned to sudden flame a feud among two of the reckless high livers of these halcyon days, and the fishing expedition had ended disastrously in this outbreak of passion, but the catch of trout was fine, and the weary fishermen, the negroes, brought for the purpose, slyly finished the julep, gathered up the dishes, the remains of the dinner and the scattered cards. After loading the wagon they soon followed their masters back to town.

These were the good old days "befo' de wah!" The sun had set and the sweet summer day was dead. The river flowed on undisturbed by the troubles of men; quiet settled over the forest, and myriads of fire-flies lit up the quiet knoll, where the upturned benches and rude tables stood deserted. Many empty bottles lay around and torn cards were littered there, telling with unfailing indication, all the littleness of man amidst the greatness of Nature!

Nature consecrates, man—man alone—desecrates!

In the beautiful Revolutionary town of Camden, in one of the bravest old Southern states, the scene of this South Carolina story is laid, a few years prior to the late war. The aristocrat still ruled in his high born pride. Then a Southern gentleman and land owner was an uncrowned king in his own right; surrounded by his banded slaves, his social parasites, and his jesters of low estate. Lifted up by his royal heritage of birth and breeding. They were sybarites in their habits, these planters; they threw their gold carelessly broadcast, raced their blooded horses, for pastime only, though a

plantation sometimes changed hands on the result. They took thoroughly to heart the wise advice of the ancient poet, "Enjoy the golden present, it is thine!" The epicureans of old Rome did not live in greater luxury.

The beauty and culture of the women of these social grandees was equal to that of the Aspasian age in Greece!

No grim war cloud brooded on the horizon of the grand old Southland, and peace and prosperity reigned over all! These were the halcyon days of the proud Palmetto State!

Lord Cornwallis had been stationed there at Camden, with his profligate set of British soldiers. Washington, De Kalb and LaFayette had made the dreamy old town historic, and the gifted Gilmore Sims had gone to that region for the glamor of his romances of the stirring Colonial days, when the desperate Indians were driven, still fighting, from their dark forest homes and at last almost annihilated. For vile saltpetre and leaden balls were too much for the bare-breasted Cherokees, the errant knights of bow and arrow—and the sword prevailed over the tomahawk!

Full many a phantom shade, arrayed in war paint, and feathered head-dress, still haunts those pine forests, and spectral warriors paddle their light canoes down the broad, swift river, by the light of the midnight moon.

The mournful screech-owls have taken up their once heard battle cry, the whip-poorwills their plaintive voices from the echoless shore, and the mocking birds sing again their thrilling songs of love; for, no more will they rove their happy hunting grounds in our conquered forests. But, the romance of the vanished Indian chivalry lingers here in the gloom, like Banquo's ghost.

CHAPTER II.

A PLANTATION HOME.

When the carriage with Dr. Daniel Blake, Col. Ashmore and the wounded Julian Charles, drew up before the tall gates of the Anchorage, they were quickly opened by the little pickaninnies, whose great black eyes grew as round as marbles when they fell upon their young master lying there as one dead, supported on the old doctor's broad breast, with the tell-tale blood stains but too evident on his coat. One of the youngsters rushed up the driveway like a frightened rabbit, and dashed on into the house, shouting, "O, Miss Ma'y, Miss Ma'y, Massa Julian done dead! an' de folks is bringin' him home!"

So when the carriage rolled slowly up the driveway, and stopped at last, before the broad stone steps, a white faced woman, her hands clasped on her breast, met it and looked pleadingly into Dr. Blake's face with her wild, black eyes dilated in a mute agony.

"Oh, it is nothing, simply nothing, Mrs. Charles; compose yourself. It is just a mere scratch, we will have the boy dancing as usual in a few weeks," cried the doctor. "He's all right now!"

"What is it, gentlemen? Col. Ashmore, did I not beg you always to watch over my son?" the sweet voice cried reproachfully. The kindly doctor's eyes were downcast, as he said: "Before God, Madam, I tried to stop these two hot blooded young villains, but I could do nothing; he and Kendricks had some hasty words, they exchanged shots, and here he is, peppered a little, while that madcap, Kendricks, is unhurt, and as gay as a March hare riding away homeward."

"Don't blame me, don't blame me, my dear Madam! You know what our young bloods are!" And the courtly Col. Ashmore then sprang down from the carriage and raised the mother's soft, white hand reverently to his lips; whilst old York, scrambled hurriedly from his high seat, perched up beside the driver, and fell abjectly on his knees, crying: "'Fore Gord! Miss Ma'y! Mars' Henry ain't to blame; it was dat mint julep done it, an' I made it! Miss Ma'y I'se to blame; please Mam beat me! Lay on de rod on my ole bare back, but doan you blame my ole Marster!"

Mrs. Charles could not help but smile through her tears as she clasped the faithful old York's hand and bade him arise, for the chain of bondage lay lightly upon the old servitor.

The frightened house servants soon hurried out to assist the wounded man up the winding staircase to his own room. While his mother smoothed his pillow and hung lovingly over her boy, the young duelist faintly smiled up at her, and then kissed the caressing hand.

"Thanks be to God! He lives!" she cried, as her stately head fell upon his breast.

The bullet was deftly extracted and the wounded shoulder bandaged as quickly as Dr. Dan's practiced hands could accomplish it, whilst Col. Ashmore paced the library below, anxiously awaiting the news. These little sudden affairs of honor were no rarity in the State which gave us the fighting code.

Presently the agitated Mrs. Charles glided noiselessly into the room. A faint color had returned to her fair cheeks and a gleam of the old brightness to her dark eyes. She was a tall, grand, imposingly formed woman of forty-five years, and still the reigning queen of the country side. She had been a stately widow for the last ten years, and the chivalric Col. Ashmore had been throughout that time her devoted slave.

He had secretly kept his faith for thrice as many years,

never having married because of his blighted love for Mary Eversley. He had never dreamed of giving up the one darling hope of winning her hand at last in marriage, though he certainly received but little open encouragement from the fair widow. She had loved her departed husband, devotedly, although he had been far too fond of the cup, and had spent a fortune for her in the reckless planter style.

She received, however, at his death, enough from his heavy life insurance to keep up her home and live peacefully in fitting style, though it took good management and housewifery to do so. And yet she had never repined, nor replaced the lover of her girlhood.

"Now, Col. Ashmore, as Julian is at last comfortably sleeping, and the Doctor is watching beside him with Maria Becky, I want you to tell me what unforeseen quarrel caused this trouble; who was to blame?"

There was a flash of the fighting spirit of the land in her clear eyes.

"Sit down, sit down, my dear madam," said the suave Colonel, pulling forward a large rocker. He remained deferentially standing until she was made comfortable, and then, with a sigh, sank into a chair beside her. With a flourish of his bandana, he wiped his heated brow, and began his recollections of the sudden altercation.

"It was all the fault of that damned Kendricks; O pardon me, pardon me, pray pardon me, Madam! my tongue will run away with me; I meant no disrespect." Perhaps the sentiments were approved, even if couched in such energetic form, for the lady bowed, and smiled her forgiveness as he continued, twisting uneasily under her inspiring eyes: "You see, Kendricks, as usual, was drinking too much, and Julian had unluckily lost at cards. Boys will be boys, you know. I was there to try to restrain, and ready to check him, but he would not be interfered with. Kendricks very grossly spoke far too freely of Miss Howard, as he proposed a toast in her

name, and Julian dashed his wine glass in Kendricks' face; then the wild storm of hatred burst forth! They both insisted upon fighting at once, and we could not prevent it! They were armed, of course. Our sad practice—the thing you know too well—occurred again!"

"I fear, my friend, that you are not cool enough to be a proper guardian for Julian. Your own blood is a bit fiery," began Mrs. Charles, veiling her twinkling eyes.

"Upon my honor, my dear madam, I really tried to prevent the duel. Of course, it was an affair of honor and a blow had been passed. But, I will do anything, anything! By Gad! I'll call out Kendricks myself. I'll —I'll horsewhip him, publicly! Yes! and then, shoot him afterwards. Command me, Madam, in any way!"

Mrs. Charles could restrain herself no longer, but burst forth into peals of merry laughter. Her knight errant was a veritable fire eater, and, she knew it.

"You will simply be my old hot-headed, devoted friend—always the same," she cried, grasping his hand warmly, and with the ready tears of gratitude springing to her eyes. He had touched her woman's heart by his devotion.

"Friend, my dear Madam! Yes, and more than friend, whenever you will let me call you mine. Mary, the devotion of a whole life time is yours, and you have known it long!"

The gallant gentleman was trembling before his beloved one.

"There, there, dear Colonel, leave these sentiments for another time; my Julian will be now awaiting me. Do try, though, and keep this little episode quiet for Carolyn's sake; she is a dear girl and will feel all this deeply. It must not reach the public. I trust to you to prevent it. Good night, dear Colonel; I see your old York is now gazing wistfully in at the window. Dear, faithful

old servant!" It was a welcome diversion, for the Colonel was still resolute in his pleading.

"By Jove! that confounded old nigger will not let me say my prayers alone! I'll—I'll order him to stay at home hereafter!" said the irate Colonel, as he wrung both of Mrs. Charles' beloved hands vigorously, with a suggestive warmth of lover-like pressure.

"No, you will not, Colonel, you are now as dependent on good old York as he is on you, and whoever consents to be Mrs. Ashmore will certainly be wise enough to have a warm nook at the ingleside for old York. Good night! Good night!"

And the lover dreamed of a future answer, which thrilled him, as the lady fled away in secret glee.

Bad news is soon winged about; the very birds on the housetop carry it in their flight! The unfortunate duel was noised far and near.

Early next morning a young lady on horseback was smartly dashing up the woodland path toward the Anchorage, followed, at a little distance, by her own groom. She was a splendid creature, and beneath the light of the new day, sifting down through the soft green leaves, she seemed a veritable Diana, hieing to the chase.

She was tall and buxom, and sat her horse superbly; her bronze-gold hair was worn twisted in a low coil on her white neck, and a graceful feather daintily drooped from her riding cap over her fair brow. Her coloring was radiant with health, her eyes as tenderly brown as a fawn's, but not as timidly gentle; all in all, her chiseled features were of the mould that Phidias would have chosen for the spirited Lady Artemis.

She rode up to the horse block at the door of the Anchorage, sprang lightly from her horse and carelessly threw the reins to the groom, who had hurried up too late to assist her.

A radiant young goddess, freshened with the dews of morning, she was a vision of beauty. With a lithe step,

she strode quickly along the piazza and then rang the bell, with a familiar touch.

An old butler opened the door and bowed low before Miss Carolyn Howard, who was evidently la belle amie de la maison.

"Good morning, Uncle Jake, I want to see Mrs. Charles. Is she up yet?"

"O yes, Miss Car'line! Miss Ma'y done been up ever since the sun rose. She in the room with Mars' Julian now!"

"Please tell her that I wish to see her, at once, for a few moments; I will await her down here in the library," and the fair visitor passed in as one thoroughly familiar with the house and always sure of a welcome. Carolyn Howard's bright face brought its own welcome everywhere.

"Carolyn, you here, so early?" cried Mrs. Charles. With a cry the girl sprang into her arms and then kissed her warmly, saying, "Oh, dear Mrs. Charles! I know that you must hate me; Oh, I am so sorely grieved! How is Julian? To think that I might have been the innocent cause of his death, he is so brave and such a gallant champion!" Her voice trembled and the tears were shining in her eyes.

"Dear child, compose yourself; I did hope that the real cause of the duel had been kept from you! Julian is out of danger. He is already getting along nicely, and if no fever sets in, he will soon be as well as ever. Indeed, dearest, you are not to blame in this for anything! Come, and take your breakfast with me. Yes, I insist," and with her tender hands of hospitality, she drew the distressed girl along into the large bright dining room, where old Jake was already placing the silver and cut glass on the grand old mahogany table.

Carolyn paused and poured out her heart to the one she loved:

"Mrs. Charles, I could weep that I have no mother

to go to; the very thought of the presumption of Gus Kendricks maddens me, and yet, Uncle likes him, and wishes me to encourage his attentions, simply because of his money and his famous, fine horses, I do believe. You know that Uncle James regards horses as next to angels, and he has been simply crazy to own 'May Queen,' that fleet thoroughbred racer of Mr. Kendricks. He overlooks all the master's many bad points, on account of the horses' good ones. He is simply sport crazed and racing mad! A good old gentlemanly passion, but, so troublesome just now."

Mrs. Charles laughed and caressed the fair, gold-brown head, from which Carolyn had thrown her hat. She loved the spirited beauty with all her heart.

"In my opinion, this reckless young gambler and racing man, Mr. Kendricks, is not a proper associate for any young girl of family. Dearest, you are right, and, if you were my own daughter, I would at once forbid him the house. There are many dark tales of his wild profligacy and his needless cruelty to his poor slaves. He is no credit to the planter caste of good old Carolina. I only wish that Julian could have punished him a little instead of receiving all the damage himself!"

"But there is no way of ruling him out of men's society."

"What of your uncle, darling?"

"Oh! Uncle James is going on as usual; he is rampant over the excited politics; he is out 'stumping' the countryside now, followed by Edwin, and at work arousing public feeling about that new railroad. Mrs. Charles," the girl thoughtfully mused, "is it not strange what a remarkable affection Uncle James has for this valet? A colored man!"

"He is greatly superior to his race, dear, and this Edwin is really a very intelligent man, a person of intellect, I hear," said Mrs. Charles. The fair widow guarded her own personal surmises, and gazed at the wondering

girl in silence. "He must be; Uncle will not move without him, and will express no decision on current matters without first consulting with Edwin; this is strange, too, for the boy is always so taciturn and sad looking. Hardly a chatterer, from his depressed, melancholy air."

"No wonder, dear, he feels far above his own people and yet, he cannot affiliate with our race. It is a terrible crime against society that such unhappily placed creatures exist! I think that Judge Howard made a great mistake in over-educating him. I suppose that Mammy is well?" said the hostess, willing to avoid the painful social sore spot.

"Yes, Mammy is wonderfully well; but her old eyes are failing so rapidly that I will soon have to get a young maid to dress me and attend to my wardrobe. I fear that will nearly kill poor old Mammy! So faithful!"

After an hour's cheery chat and a leisurely breakfast, Carolyn Howard set out on her homeward way. She rode a fine, but vicious-looking black horse, which no ordinary woman would have dared to mount.

Erebus was an ugly animal; but, Carolyn Howard was a most accomplished equestrienne and none realized it more than her skittish horse.

Toby, her little black groom, could hardly keep his mistress in sight, and he cut and slashed and swore away at his slower horse unmercifully! He labored along far in the rear. It was a smart dash through the dreamy old forest.

As they came out of the forest road into the broad highway, a galloping horseman dashed up and joined Miss Carolyn; it was Augustus Kendricks, the young fire-eater.

Returning a haughty stare only, in answer to his sweeping bow, she quickly touched the restive Erebus with her whip and away he darted like an arrow shot from a bow.

Kendricks rode his celebrated racer, May Queen, and driving his spurs deep into her dainty flanks, he soon overtook the fair runaway and excitedly grasped her bridle.

The haughty girl's eyes blazed at the easy impertinence.

"Unloose my rein, sir! At once! At once!" cried Carolyn, with a sudden rage.

But the hot-blooded intruder would not obey!

"No! my lady, I will not let you go till I have had my say; you are surely not going to cut me on account of the little shooting fracas of yesterday, are you?" His voice trembled in his eager passion.

"I wish no explanation whatever from you, sir! Will you unloose my horse?" demanded Carolyn, with quivering nerves, tingling with maidenly resentment.

"No! by heaven! I will not!" cried Kendricks.

There was a swinging slash, a sharp swish through the air, and my lady's substantial riding whip descended, its keen lash cutting across the detaining hand, causing the blood to freely spurt out. It was the cut direct and well laid on.

An oath burst from Kendricks' lips, but, he did not remove his hand. There was a brutal menace in his eyes.

"Before God! you will live to repent of that blow, Carolyn Howard; just wait awhile!" he growled.

She turned pale now and her lips were ashen, for she had not realized what she had done until she saw the blood streaming from the open wound caused by her rawhide whip.

"I am very sorry; I did not mean to hurt you, Mr. Kendricks. Forgive me, please!" she faltered. "Let me tie it up for you!" It was the rebound of her own generous heart and maiden modesty vanquished her high pride.

"No, I thank you. I will keep this scar to use as a

reminder hereafter! Now, you must allow me to have my say out, Miss Howard. I meant no disrespect by the enthusiastic remark which that hot-headed champion, Julián Charles, so publicly resented, and think all men know I regard you as sacredly as he does, considering my undisguised intentions."

"Indeed, sir! I thank you for your publicly manifested intentions, but they say that 'hell is paved with good intentions,' and, I suppose, you have a fully completed pavement by this time!" Carolyn laughed tauntingly.

His patronizing vaunt of his devotion had stung her to the quick.

They were now fording a swiftly running creek, and Kendricks carefully lifted his heels so that his immaculate white trousers might not get a drenching. He suddenly broke out, "Carolyn! you know that I love you, and that I wish to make you——"

This compromising sentence was never finished, for with a look of reckless mischief, she raised her whip again, and gave a sharp cut to the fiery May Queen.

The beautiful thoroughbred mare, surprised and indignant, reared up wildly and flung her rider, landing him prone on his back in the deep creek, whilst, with a peeling laugh, Carolyn whipped up Erebus, and, dashing down the road, was soon out of sight.

It was both defeat and disgrace for Kendricks, who floundered out of the water in a rage.

Poor Toby suffered the penalty of his young mistress' imprudent prank, for he came upon the scene just as Kendricks emerged from the stream, dripping and swearing, and mud from head to foot!

The flying May Queen was nowhere in sight, only a cloud of dust rising in the distance told where she had passed along at a speed which sustained her record.

"You accursed imp! don't stand staring at me with your devilish goggle eyes!" Kendricks yelled with a spasm of rage.

"Get off that horse, quick, I tell you!" The little horse-boy knew the planter's malignant ferocity, and he drew a gasping breath.

Quaking in his red-topped boots, Toby slipped deftly to the ground and just escaped Kendricks' foot as he rushed across the bridge-log and quickly put the creek between them. The alarmed Toby did not turn tail till he was safely within the gates of "Sunset Manor," Judge Howard's grand old country seat, where the watchful Carolyn met him. She threatened to use her dangerous riding whip on her groom for giving up the horse to the insulting swain, instead of putting spurs, and so leaving Kendricks to foot it home, "a wiser if not a better man!" But, Toby had wisely dreaded the resentment of a man famed throughout the whole country side for his cruelty. He had the poor slave's excuse: "Theirs not to reason why; theirs but to do and die," in their lifelong surrender of volition to the domineering white lords of the soil.

And, even Carolyn Howard, high spirited and triumphant, was herself a little doubtful of the future value of the victory of the exciting morning rencontre.

CHAPTER III.

A FINE OLD SOUTHERN GENTLEMAN—ALL OF THE OLDEN TIME.

Judge Howard had, in his youth, been a very wild young sprig of chivalry; he was duly expelled, à la mode, from several northern colleges, and, at last, in despair, his disappointed father had busied the wild boy at reading law in his own office. There he proved later an intellectual success, for he was a natural leader, a born politician, and a graceful speaker. However, many outrageous stories became current as to the young

aristocrat's social excesses. It was known, but charitably hushed up, that a young and picturesquely beautiful slave in his father's possession had died unexpectedly leaving an infant son three-quarters white. The dead girl's mother was given charge of the infant, and as he grew older, he developed into a remarkably intelligent boy—one of nature's anomalies. He was sent off to the north to be carefully educated by the morally responsible James Howard, when he came into his patrimonial estate, and, for several years the young protegè was not seen in South Carolina.

Young Howard made a great professional success; he was a leader at the bar, when he married, rather late in life, a wealthy Virginia heiress; she died, however, at the expiration of two years, and with wifely devotion left all of her immense fortune and broad acres to her distinguished husband. He never married again; but when his only brother died, leaving an orphan girl just ten years of age, he adopted her as his own child, and loved her most tenderly. She was the little queen of his lonely heart.

After his wife's death he brought the talented young quadroon, Edwin Roper, into the household to act as his own confidential body servant.

Roper was a man of superior intelligence and evident breeding, despite the taint of his black blood; he was a splendid type of the unfortunate class to which he belonged—those border line beings of unhappy parentage. He seemed to live a desolate life, affiliating with neither well-defined race, seldom smiling, and never lifting up his mournful voice. He attended to his important duties perfectly, and Judge Howard seemed to hold him somewhat in awe, for there was ever the influence of the unacknowledged tie.

Carolyn Howard, graceful and lovely, always had a smile and kind word for everyone, and in consequence, she was adored by all the slaves. She felt a great yearn-

ing sympathy for poor Roper, for, not knowing the unhappy secret of his birth, and recognizing his worth, she had always treated him with a peculiar consideration and kindness.

Judge Howard was a gifted orator, a high liver, a good master, as masters went, and fond of his own ease and comfort above everything else.

He had his own intimate set of old cronies, comprising Doctor Daniel Blake, Col. Henry Ashmore, and an old Scotchman named Christy McCay.

Mr. McCay was noted over the broad country side for his fine wines, his extreme ugliness, and the dry wit of his caustic nation. These four boon companions met together once or twice every week for a social game of whist, and they generally played at a modest dollar a point, just to add zest, they said! It was the extreme of modest limit in those prosperous ante-bellum days.

Col. Ashmore's famous factotum, old York, was always on hand to brew a punch or concoct his wondrous mint julep; and the Judge would often soberly quote, as he passed around the bowl: "Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by this son of York," the slave's father before him, having also been a York, by acquired name. They would all drink long and deep, as the old-time southern gentleman could, not indulge in a fighting, vulgar, loathsome spree, but take just enough of the "genuine stuff" to give loose rein to the imagination and warm the cockles of their hearts! A "jovial crew!" Col. Ashmore would tilt his chair back, and joyously raise his steaming old brown mug to his lips as he sang:

Here's the top of the day,
To ye, Christy McCay,
And a heap of them piled up high!
Here is drinking your health,
And, wishing you wealth,
And, hoping you never may die!

"Anyway while your cellar holds such rich, old, mellow wine!"

And they all would laugh till the happy Bacchus tribute tears rolled down their faces,—and, "By the by," the old Judge often asked, "Say, Dan, do you remember the night we all had the game supper and a shy at the cards afterwards? McCay was too tired to get away and slept on the sofa there, all night, and you and Ashmore undertook to drive home at three o'clock in the morning, in the dark of the moon; it was the blind leading the blind that time, my boy!

"For, the punch was too strong,
And the drive was too long,
  And, poor devils, you both went to sleep!
And your horse got away,
And till late the next day,
  You slumbered there in the dirt heap!"

They would all shout uproariously at this unforgotten frolic, and then old York would chime in and say gleefully, showing his eyeballs, "Yes-sa, Mars' Jedge, I cotch 'em at it, yes-sa! Mars' Henry didn't turn up at brekfus, sa—and I 'lowed dat sumfin was up; so I just sat out to look 'em up—yes-sa, the shafs wus all broke, an' de buggy was turn ober in de ditch—an', 'fore God—dare was Mars' Henry, an' Mars' Dan lyin' bof of 'em asleep in de fence corner! Dey was jest er sleepin' the sleep of de just! 'Fore God it wus funny, Mars' Jedge! Ole Bob wus a browsing quietly away down in de ribber bottoms, as contented as a nigger eatin' 'possum and 'taters!"

Dr. Dan kept a fine kennel of hounds, trained bird dogs and deer hounds as well; and his chief pet of this canine congress was an English bull dog, and this famous Towser was the acknowledged terror of the entire county. He was a most ferocious, ugly beast, and was supposed to be kept chained up all the time. No one

ventured near the house until first calling out, "Halloo House! is the dog chained?"

One afternoon Mr. McCay walked leisurely over to pay his respects to Mrs. Blake, and the numerous little Blakes, and he had unfortunately forgotten to ascertain Towser's whereabouts.

What was his consternation and horror when half way up the drive to see old Towser coming full tilt toward him, with a fiendish grin on his face exposing all of his sharp ivories! Terror froze the heart of the cautious McCay, and he looked around in vain for human aid; then a sudden inspiration seized him and he dropped down upon "all fours."

With a terrific noise, he rushed toward the fierce-looking dog, his immense head, with its bristling iron gray hair, was thrown down, and to the charging Towser it seemed as if a most horrible Cerberus had broken loose from Hades! The bull dog eyed his adversary for a single moment, and then, with a yelp of fear, he tucked his tail between his legs and incontinently fled! Dr. Dan swore that his Towser's spirit was broken forever by this defeat, and that he never needed a restraining chain any more.

The Doctor's daughter, Nina, was an intimate friend of the budding Carolyn Howard, and often spent weeks in visits at Sunset Manor, Judge Howard's splendid country seat. It was but three miles from the roystering Augustus Kendricks' plantation. He was a most successful planter and owned a large number of slaves, over whom he held a perpetual reign of terror! He was a Draconian master! His fine plantation lay along the broad river, and in its tillage was kept wonderfully neat, considering its great acreage; the hillsides were terraced with grape vines, and neatly trimmed square hedges of mock orange formed the dividing fences on every side. Kendricks took great pride and joy in his estate, and liked to be considered the best farmer in the county.

There was a decent village for the slaves, consisting of a store, a church, and a row of neatly whitewashed, comfortable cabins, with gardens attached for the slave families. The young planter's one ungratified desire was to have a beautiful, high-born wife—one suited to reign over his broad realm; and the regal Carolyn Howard was his heart's choice. In his arrogant pride, he believed that he only had to express his cherished wish to be instantly accepted; and when he found, later, a powerful rival in the chivalric Julian Charles, he at once set himself to bluffing boldly to win the game.

Nina Blake was lingering on a long visit to Carolyn later in this summer, and, when they were returning from boating one day they beheld the persistent wooer, Gus Kendricks, dismounting before the piazza.

"Nina, Nina, if you love me, deliver me from this pestering fiend!" cried Carolyn. "I know that he has never gotten over the cut I gave his insolent hand, the deep scar will remain there forever, and I do not believe that he ever wears a glove to conceal it, for he delights in having people ask him the cause if it! Ah, Mr. Kendricks, good evening. So kind of you to come over!"

"You do me honor, Miss Howard!" the planter replied, in his deep, hoarse voice.

"La, Mr. Kendricks, what a cold you have," vivaciously cried Nina, "did you ever try composition tea and a hot foot bath for it?"

Carolyn broke into laughter as he flatly replied, "No, Miss Blake. I tried a cold plunge bath and an electric shock after it; but, as you see, it did me no good! Miss Carolyn, is the Judge at home? I want to speak to him of the races which we are now arranging. I have entered 'May Queen' in the mile and a half sweepstake, and Roland in the trotting races, and I am willing to stake my fortune on them! There are no horses in the state to equal them!"

"I can vouch for the swiftness of May Queen!"

laughed Carolyn, looking up mischievously at Kendricks.

"Edwin! Edwin!" she called to her uncle's valet, who stood silently on the back piazza looking out moodily over the distant landscape.

The slave youth started as her ringing voice reached him, and he came down rapidly toward her. "Yes, Miss Howard, what can I do for you?"

He appeared not to observe the haughty planter standing beside them.

"Is Uncle James at home? If so, tell him that Mr. Kendricks has called and that he wishes to see him at once."

The mute messenger bowed and then turned to depart.

"Stop, fellow!" called Augustus. "Say to the Judge that I will join him in about an hour; I am quite sufficiently entertained at present. That is a fine specimen for a negro," he then said, insolently, turning back to the ladies. "I wonder if the Judge could be induced to put him on the block or take a good blood race horse for him? I wouldn't mind owning that dandy darkey. I would soon bring him around!"

Roper's face turned livid, and a look of suppressed fury darkened his brow as he answered contemptuously, "I don't think, Mr. Augustus Kendricks, that my owner wishes to part with me, but, certainly, one of your horses is worth much more than a man's freedom, or even the price of his body and soul!"

It was a bold retort.

"Why, you impudent scoundrel!" angrily cried Kendricks, and, lifting his whip, he would have brought it down across the slave's face, had not Carolyn Howard quickly sprung forward with flushed brow and blazing eyes and caught the cruel blow full on her tender palm. A cry of horror rang out from both Edwin Roper and Nina Blake. A look of intense physical agony shone in

Carolyn's eyes, as she pressed the wounded hand to her breast and hissed, "Coward!"

It recalled the brute to his senses. Kendricks hastily flung his whip from him and he was almost sobbing as he humbly begged her forgiveness on his knees, and then Carolyn Howard, looking down pitilessly at him, laughed scornfully, and said, "Of course I forgive you; it is only tit for tat, and you should now be satisfied, brave Mr. Kendricks!"

The quadroon slave stood near at hand, with clenched fist, and his teeth were bitten into his lower lip, as he tried to repress his blind fury.

There was a manly shame and remorse in his burning eyes; for he could not strike a blow to defend his fair young mistress, even though he would have given his very heart's blood to save her pain. He was—only a slave!

Carolyn noted his torturing anguish, and her agitated voice softened as she calmly said, "Go, Edwin, go in, and tell Uncle James that Mr. Kendricks wishes to see him, at once!" She then linked her arm in Nina Blake's, and dropping a low curtesy, said, "We wish you a very good evening, brave Mr. Kendricks!" The young aristocrates went on swiftly to the house.

Nina cried, "Oh, Carolyn, what a brutal beast that man Kendricks is! But, how superb poor Edwin looked as he stood there trembling in his wrath! Did you notice his swollen veins and suppressed fury? He would have made a perfect statue, were he blacker, of Othello, and one could almost have forgiven the patrician Desdemona for her strange infatuation!"

"Why, Nina Blake, how can you speak so! I think that she only met with her just deserts for having stooped to link her own life to a man of black blood! It is a most revolting tale, and one could almost lose devotion to Shakespeare for having written it!"

In Carolyn's unawakened sympathies, caste, even then, soared high over nature.

"Come in, and let old Mammy bind up my bruised hand. It burns terribly and stings me intolerably!"

Judge Howard sat in his library writing a stirring article for public enlightenment on the need of a new railroad line through their opulent country, when his valet, Edwin, entered the room.

"Master," he said in coldly constrained tones, "your neighbor, Squire Gus Kendricks, wishes to see you at once, if you please!"

"Hey? Hey? Oh yes, Augustus Kendricks, show him in at once, Edwin," and the Judge then bustled up, and his genial face beamed with his habitual hospitality.

"Master!" cried Edwin, with a restraining, outstretched hand, "beware of that man. He is a cold-hearted brute, and unfit to breathe the same air as your neice, Miss Howard!"

"Bless my soul, Edwin, are you going crazy? You forget yourself. Mr. Kendricks is my intimate friend, and he owns the very finest horses in the state. There, there, show him up now."

"Oh, Judge, here you are!" cried the loud voice of Kendricks, as he noisily entered the door with outstretched hand.

The look of worry faded away from his host's face as he grasped it warmly.

The visitor saw his cordial welcome with secret triumph. "Sit down, Kendricks. Try one of these cigars; they are unusually fine—a late present from the Governor."

"I hope they are not as strong as his famous old whisky," said Kendricks, laughing loudly, "a few drinks of it cost me a cool thousand dollars at poker the last time I visited the capital. And, I have a pretty strong head!"

"What have you been doing lately?" the Judge asked.

"Any more duels on hand? That must stop! It is really too bad that you young fellows are so hot headed! Julian Charles is his very father over again! Poor fellow, he lost his life foolishly in a duel—and such a useless one it was, too!"

"You know how much I have regretted that unfortunate episode, Judge, on account of its placing me in such a bad light before Miss Carolyn. It seems that some accursed fate has been showing me off only in bad lights of late, and this stupid accident just now was simply too much! Your upstart negro, Roper, was most insulting to me, and I, forgetting myself, lifted my whip to strike at him. Miss Carolyn, unfortunately, caught the blow full in her hand, by accident, bruising it painfully. I am so grieved over it that I could break that damned fellow's neck! He is beyond his position!"

"Carolyn's hand hurt. Why that is indeed too bad!" cried the Judge, starting up excitedly, "however, I suppose it is needless for me to go to her. I know her faithful old Mammy is binding it up by this time—the dear, high-spirited girl! Speak of blooded horses and thoroughbreds, why that girl has the true southern blue blood in her veins; she is fearless and game.

"Now, look here, Kendricks, I am your friend; but, everyone knows that you are, unfortunately, far too high tempered and you bear down too hard on your own slaves also. You had better beware, young man! You need toning down, socially—a good wife would be the thing to balance you. Don't you ever interfere with my slaves again! Edwin Roper is a very fine fellow, and he always does his duty to my entire satisfaction, and I can tell you that he is a man it would not be safe to tamper with too far, even if he has a few drops of negro blood in his veins."

"I acknowledge, Judge, that I am often too hasty," humbly said the planter. "I know that I need a gentle, restraining hand, a good noble wife! That is the prin-

cipal reason why I am down here to-night. I am, however, known to be a man of honor, at least. You know all my people, Judge; they are as fine bred a race as ever stood upon the turf. I am comfortably rich, and well able to allow my chosen wife to live like a queen; I have ready slaves to do her bidding; my blood horses at her command! What else can any woman wish?" and the eager Kendricks then plunged his hands deep into his trousers' pockets and looked anxiously at the old Judge. It was the crossing of the Rubicon.

"That should be, certainly, enough to make most women happy, Kendricks; such a county position, with a kind, loving husband thrown in. You know that all women like a little coddling; it's in their soft natures, I guess.

"But," the old aristocrat mused, as he hesitated, "you will have to tone down a good deal, Kendricks, my boy!"

The suitor's heart leaped up in a sudden joy.

"If I really try to govern myself and to become a better man, will you then give your consent to my addressing your niece, Miss Carolyn, Judge? She is the one woman in the whole world for me!" he added most earnestly.

There was no doubt of the planter's passionate desire. "Bless my soul! This is a surprise; you marry Carolyn! Yes, you can try it, old fellow, but you will find that Carolyn has a will of her own. I fear it will be a case of Greek meeting Greek! No Petruchio business would conquer my high-spirited Carolyn!" exclaimed the Judge with decision. "I will, however, wish you God speed. Go in, my boy, and win her if you can! Oh, tush! tush! don't look so elated! The race has not even begun yet," he added as Kendricks excitedly grasped his hands and wrung them gratefully. "And now, speaking of races, reminds me of 'May Queen.' Is

she in good form now? Can I back her to win in these coming races? You must post me."

"There is nothing in the entries yet dangerous to 'May Queen,' Judge!" proudly said the visitor. "I'll go blind on her. I stake my sporting reputation on her winning straight away, barring accidents. Only Chester's mare is a bit up to her class. She is a half sister to my filly. He has a first-rate man handling her also; but, take my advice, as one who has a thorough knowledge of horse-flesh, if you bet at all, put your money on 'May Queen' at the best you can get. By heaven, if she don't win, I will shoot her and leave her dead in the field! It is a sure thing!" and then, Kendricks brought his heavy fist down on the table, making the books dance.

"Well, I must be going!" said the suitor, rising, "please try now and set me right with Miss Carolyn. I am really distressed!"

"I'll do my best, Kendricks, believe me; but stay, no man can leave my house without first tasting of my wine. It is my weak point!" and the Judge smartly touched the silver gong on his writing table. Roper immediately appeared.

"Some glasses and a decanter of the '50 port, Edwin!" The strangely assorted friends drank a rousing glass to each other's health and to mutual good luck; then hearty good-nights were exchanged, and young Kendricks mounted his impatient horse and with a light heart rode gayly homeward.

CHAPTER IV.

A VISIT IN STATE!

It was three long, dragging weeks before Julian Charles was fairly convalescent, and his delighted mother had a rocking chair drawn out into the cosiest corner of the sunny south veranda. There he could breathe the balsamic golden air, inhale the soft perfume of the Marechal Neil roses which covered the slender pillars, and look far away down the sloping hillside to the wooded banks of the river beyond. The air from the water was fresh and forest scented and it brought the healing balm on its fluttering wings to the fevered invalid.

Mrs. Charles sat beside him, pensively reading, one fair morning, and old Becky, his negro nurse, had just deposited a tray of most tempting dainties on the long settee beside him, when a great coach, glittering with diamond-faceted glass and emblazoned with the Howard coat of arms, rolled up the drive and stopped at the front of the house.

The sable footmen in their rich green and gold liveries sprang down and grandly threw open the door, when Judge Howard, Carolyn and Nina Blake leisurely alighted. It was a visit of state!

Mrs. Charles called out her welcome delightedly to them, and they soon came trooping through the rose garden, over the grassy lawn, to the invalid's sunny bower.

"And, how is the wounded cavalier?" asked Judge Howard, pressing eagerly forward. "Why you are blooming as a June rose in your new dressing-gown and those embroidered slippers! Why, Carolyn, my dear, didn't I see you working on a pair of slippers very

much like those some time ago?" It was a chance shot, but it told.

The startled Carolyn flushed and then looked guiltily down, "Uncle James, you have a most uncomfortably good memory at times! Yes, I really worked those slippers for Julian's last Christmas gift. He admired yours so very much, you know!"

"Oh! yes, I do know that; well, well, Julian, my boy, you are almost well enough to be at your nonsensical fire-eating again! We will all have to dodge behind the trees whenever you young marksmen appear!"

There was an awkward silence, and Julian looked embarrassed.

"Not quite as bad as that, Judge; I think that all the needless pain I have endured for the past four weeks will teach me one sober, little lesson—not to go a-fishing again without a hook and line!"

The duelist was self-convicted! At this they all laughed merrily, and drew their chairs nearer around the interesting young invalid.

Aunt Becky bustled quickly away, and soon returned with the Madeira decanter and its egg-shell glasses, and displayed one of the home cook's famous old pound cakes.

This pride of the family bore the euphonious name of "Amazing Grace," and an amazingly good cook was she, famed over the country side. She was called Grace, for short, despite her two hundred and twenty-five pounds avoirdupois!

"Ole Aunt Becky" had been presented to Mrs. Charles by an amiable uncle on her wedding day, and she had nursed the hopeful young Julian from his birth. She was a most devoted and faithful negro, and was an oracle among her own race. She could tie her bandana in the very highest bow, and drop the lowest courtesy of any other mammy in the whole country. What Aunt Becky didn't know about raising babies, brewing herb

teas and all queer concoctions wasn't worth knowing. The negroes regarded her with fear, as the "Conjure doctor," and, so they held her in the greatest superstitious awe. If any one of them was taken mysteriously sick, then Aunt Becky was at once sent for to administer some one of her magic potions to remove the evil spell, or, if any of the dusky damsels sadly and hopelessly loved in vain, she gave them a magic charm to work in the dark of the moon, and immediately the love would be reciprocated and the pathway be filled with sweetness and light.

After passing around the informal refreshments to Mrs. Charles' guests, and tenderly patting up the invalid's pillows, her parting injunction was, "Now, Miss Ma'y, don't you let dat chile set in de sunshine too long. You know he's mine!"

The Judge laughingly remarked, "It has always been a mystery to me to know whether Becky really belongs to you, Mrs. Charles, or, you to her, and by the way, is not Col. Ashmore's shadow, old York, trying to 'wait on her,' as they say?"

"Yes, I believe that York has such soft intentions. He has long been her faithful swain; but, his case seems hopeless. He has not yet found the charm."

"Like mistress, like maid!" said the jovial Judge, teasingly, at which Mrs. Charles colored, and all the circle laughed; for the Colonel's attentions to the "county queen" were an open secret. The course of true love did not run smoothly.

"Uncle, Uncle, you are always such a tease!" exclaimed Carolyn. "Julian, I do hope that you will really be well enough to attend the races. Of course, Uncle will be there, as usual, in the judges' stand, and so Nina and I, want you and Mrs. Charles to chaperon us, for we cannot miss these races!"

"Thank you very much, Miss Carolyn, I sincerely

hope to go. Nina, which horse do you bet on for the sweepstake?" he asked, turning to his merry little friend.

" 'I bet my money on the bob-tail nag!' " she sang gayly, "and that one is May Queen. She will surely win and wear the blue ribbon, and I always bet on the winning horse, you know."

"Mr. Kendricks has won a number of silver cups; he is a successful racing man," said Carolyn, fanning herself gently.

"Yes," laughed Nina, "Papa says that he would sooner part with an eye tooth than any one of his hard-won racing cups."

"I hope, Nina, that you have no secret designs on his cups," said Carolyn with a provoking air.

"Not I, cara mia, nor on his lordship's heart either. Come, Mrs. Charles, won't you now show me your famous collection of ferns? I have heard so much of them. Judge, I know that you also want to see them. Come," cried the adroit little schemer.

The lady and her wounded lover were soon deserted.

Left alone, Carolyn fidgeted uneasily with her carved Chinese ivory fan, and tried to look the airy nonchalance which she did not feel.

The lover was also a skillful dissembler as he sighed, "Carolyn, won't you sit closer here beside me? You know that I cannot go to you, dear," said Julian softly. And, he was surely entitled to an invalid's care.

"Really, Julian, I think that you have already been too long in the sunshine. I fear that you will have a return of fever," she answered nervously.

"If I do, cara mia—did not Nina call you that? It is so appropriate and sweet—If I do take a fever, it will not be the sun that will give it to me. You know that I must not be excited. Please oblige me and come nearer, or else, I will try and go to you," threatened Julian. This awful threat told upon the lovely nurse.

Carolyn hastily arose and went over to a low chair

beside him, saying: "I suppose I must yield to a capricious invalid, and, moreover, one wounded in my cause. You are a valiant knight, Sir Julian, to fight for me so bravely!"

Her eyes were serious though her words were lightly spoken.

"Would that I could fight all your battles forever, cara mia," said Julian tenderly, his deep, dark eyes gleaming with unsatisfied love.

"I am pretty substantial, Julian, and I feel able to fight my own battles fairly well; by the by, I guess you have heard of my encounter with Mr. Kendricks?" and then she gayly laughed, endeavoring to turn aside from a dangerous subject.

Julian's brow darkened as he replied, "Yes, I heard it all from that little chatterbox, Nina; she has been over to see me often with Doctor Dan; he calls her 'his right hand,' you know? But, Carolyn, you will never allow me to have my chance to explain all, and my lady mother taught me that it was not polite to interrupt," he added jestingly. He saw that he had aroused her heart.

"Dear Julian," and Carolyn grew strongly serious, "you have your own destiny to shape yet, and I have Uncle James to look after; were I to allow you to speak now you might bitterly regret it."

"Tell me which party you are siding with since this ominous question of secession has been agitated again?"

Her eyes were sparkling.

"I will follow Judge Howard's lead, Carolyn, and so, I am a red-hot secessionist. Nothing else will ever satisfy us down here but an independent government. We can brook neither interference nor dictation, and if the laws of the United States do not protect us, we have either a right to secede, or else to make them tell us why not!"

"Good for you, my boy, good for you! There spoke out your fighting ancestor who planted the first American banner on the halls of the Montezumas! We South

Carolinians are amply able to take care of ourselves, and we need no nurse with a feeding bottle at our heels!" cried Judge Howard, coming suddenly upon them. And so, love was swamped in the tide of politics.

Mrs. Charles and Nina joined them, both applauding these noble sentiments of the gentlemen, for the southern women were no wlit behind the men in the burning sentiments of the hour.

The visitors soon departed as the sun was setting, leaving, however, one anxious heart behind.

Mrs. Charles was of old Castilian blood, and true to her birth a fearless, proud woman. Her husband had been no success on life's stage and he had made an early exit; but their only son was one of the most promising young men in the "Palmetto State." His one only obstacle was a need of the ready money to carry out his ambitious dreams.

His one inherited vice was the love of gaming, and that he had to constantly restrain, as he had always the sad example of his dead father before him.

"Tell me, mother mine," he said, as he drew her gently down beside him, when they were once more in the library, "would you not love a noble, true daughter just like——"

"Carolyn Howard," she finished, kissing him affectionately. "Yes, Julian, mio, I would indeed. But, my son, remember that Carolyn is a much sought after jewel. She will be her uncle's sole heiress, and she has already a considerable fortune of her own. I have pride enough in my boy not to wish him to offer but an empty hand! You must first make an assured success in your chosen profession before asking any woman's hand in marriage. You have unusual talents, dear, and must succeed, now that you and Philip Hastings are to become partners with Col. Goodwin."

"Mother, dearest, I would be an ingrate indeed did I not try to realize your dream for me, after all your years

of devotion and sacrifice. What other man living has such a beautiful and queenly mother as I?" and Julian Charles then lifted his mother's fair hands to his lips, reverently kissing them. The golden bond was drawn closely between them. The shuffle of feet outside aroused them, and old York stood there in the doorway bowing and scraping and smiling his approval upon the filial scene.

In his withered hands was a great white gobbler and hen, looking as immaculate as though just from a bath. "Ole Marster sent his compliments, Miss Ma'y, and 'lowed dat he knowed you would like dis pair of tuckeys to raise from. Dare ain't a gobbler in dis country to eq'al to 'Jack Fros';' you see we calls him Jack Fros' 'cause he's so white—an' 'cause he'll nip you if he gits a chance! he! he! he!

"Aunt Milly can't go out in de yard wid any peace, 'cause Jack Fros' runs arter her like a dog. Dis gobbler ain't got no respec' for po' buckra an' niggers."

The lady of the house smiled benignly. "Colonel Ashmore is very kind to part with such a valuable pair of fowls, York. Please say to him that I send him my compliments and many thanks for his kind gift. Now, York, go and give them to Ben, and find Becky and warn her to be careful whenever she passes through the poultry yard not to let Jack Frost catch her."

She and Julian laughed heartily as the old negro delightedly went away to avail himself of the golden opportunity he had hoped for, to have a chat with his sable, coy lady love.

As the turkeys strutted proudly through the poultry yard, displaying their white feathers before the wondering fowls, York rubbed his hands together and said, "You see, Becky, how proud and happy dem tuckeys is togedder. Now ef de hen was alone she would look all droopy and down-hearted like, an' ole Jack wouldn't strut so proud an' gobble, ef she warn't dere to see him,

De blessed Lord said it warn't good for a man to be by his self. Becky, how much longer is you gwine ter keep me waitin'?" The suitor's voice was husky.

"Go 'way, York; ain't I done tole you, dat as long as Miss Ma'y and Mars' Henry can't make up dare minds to jump de broom I can't either. When Miss Ma'y lets de Colonel talk, den I will gib you lief to—to talk. Come in de kitchen an' see if Grace can't gib us a cup of coffee an' den you go 'long home—I ain't got no time to fool wid you to-day."

"Ef I don't make ole Marster git a move on 'im den I wish ole Jude would kick me to kingdom come—an' dat mule sho' can kick. Becky, you wait, I'se gwinter lay a trap for Mars' Henry! You jess wait!" and, with a chuckle, he followed his lady to the spotless kitchen.

Rebecca had never married, owing to a sentimental disappointment in her early life when she belonged to Mrs. Charles' uncle, Senator Bowie.

She had plighted her troth to a village beau and the Senator was negotiating with his owner to buy him as soon as the knot was tied.

Mrs. Bowie was an extremely kind woman, and she took great pride in the welfare of her slaves; for she felt a sympathy for them in their bondage.

Next to her own children they were regarded as the most sacred trust, and she was a type of the beloved "missus."

Now, when the wedding day was fixed and the plantation seamstresses were busy preparing the bride's outfit a neat cabin was erected for the future family and the fatted calf was duly killed. All was ready.

Mrs. Bowie herself directed everything.

Aunt Ann, the cake baker, stirred up many a mammoth confection with her strong, brown hand, not sparing her elbow grease. The ovens were kept hot, and great joints of meat simmered slowly in the pots hung from the cranes in the huge fireplace of the kitchen.

All the negroes in the county who belonged to the "rich buckra" were invited to the great wedding, and the fiddlers were duly engaged to play for the dancing in the barn. Of course all the social friends of Senator Bowie and his wife were also expected to make merry. Their own clergyman was to perform the ceremony. Strange relations of master and man! Well, Becky was robed in her befrilled white muslin with a wreath of artificial white roses with green and silver-frosted leaves and white silk tasseled gloves adorned her hands.

With her six bridesmaids she awaited her coming groom.

The perfume of musk and cinnamon drops floated on the air. It was a supreme moment.

The "white folks" even began to grow excited over the strange delay, when lo and behold, the negro who was to be the best man, rode hastily up with the alarming news, "Wash is done run away wid Liza Jenkins; dey got married er hour ago!"

And then, the storm broke!

With a wild whoop, the unhappy intended bride fainted into the arms of her sympathetic attendants, and the angered Senator almost swore the roof off the house.

A number of negro men were soon dispatched in haste to find out the delinquent and bring him to justice.

He was overhauled and brought by his captors among the waiting wedding guests—he trembled with fear and looked ashy pale. The Sheriff had arrived and the deceiver was tied down to a rail, fastened under his knees, and fifty rousing lashes were laid on his bare back, while the Senator deliberately counted them aloud.

It was a sadly disappointed wedding company that sat quietly down to the well-filled tables, and all soon dispersed in the shadow of gloom.

Soon after that the beautiful Mary Eversly was married to Julian Charles and the Senator presented the "maiden all forlorn" to his niece as a wedding gift.

Years passed, and Becky, treasuring her disappointment, would see nothing of the hated sex, until Colonel Ashmore and his body servant, York, appeared on the scene. And then her heart gradually softened to York, but he was made to do penance in long and humble waiting, for the never atoned wrong perpetrated by the faithless Wash. A modern instance of one planting, another watering and an unlucky third party gathering the increase. And yet, for all his trouble, old York "snatched a fearful joy" in contemplating his "lubly" bride to be.

CHAPTER V.

"COMPTON RACES!"—PHILIP HASTINGS' QUEEN OF LOVE AND BEAUTY!—KENDRICKS LUCK AT RACE AND COUNTY BALL!

Philip Hastings, the rising young lawyer, lived in Camden town with his mother and an only sister, Maud, a young Athena just home from a fashionable seminary then much favored by the aristocratic families of the south.

Their home was quite near Dr. Blake's residence, so the young beau had ample opportunity of seeing Nina, the eldest daughter of the household.

At an early age, the deathless flower of love bloomed in their ardent hearts destined for each other; but so delicately and slowly had it grown and budded, that they did not realize it until the glorious blossom burst out into bloom.

Philip had been duly admitted to the bar, and both he and Julian, who were devoted friends and classmates, were taken into Col. Goodwin's law firm, where with influence, brains and money to back them they were now attaining a splendid professional success. Mrs. Hastings' husband had been killed long years before by an acci-

dent in the hunting field when his two children were little more than helpless infants.

Maud was a showy, dashing brunette, fond of dress and masculine admiration. She was ambitious and high strung—very different in her inner nature from her gentle, delicately organized brother, Philip.

It seemed that Dame Nature made an egregious mistake in mixing them up, even in appearances—for Philip was slender and fair, and had the face of a Raphael. A strange reversal of attributes!

With her beauty and accomplishments, Maud returned with the natural expectation of queening it over the society of her native town. She, however, found that Carolyn Howard was already enthroned there, and so, whilst pretending to be friends, the two beauties heartily disliked each other. Maud was bitterly jealous of the fair Carolyn, especially when she discovered the brilliant Julian Charles to be a suppliant at her rival's throne. This riveted a secret hatred.

Maud and Philip often had warring words over social affairs, as he would not allow his sister to dictate to him. He resented these imported airs.

"Philip, I can't imagine," she said to him one day, "what you see in Nina Blake to admire. She is just mere milk and water—a little insipid fool!"

The taunt stirred her brother's blood. "Perhaps I am not able to appreciate a stronger character, Maud; at any rate, Nina is an example of the highest type of womanhood, in my eyes."

"You are a fool, Philip, to court her. Now, there is Carolyn Howard. She is rich and fine looking. Just think what a splendid match she would be for you."

"I admit all that you say of Carolyn Howard, but she is a star far above this lowly moth, besides Julian Charles loves her and I do not. She is his choice."

"I do not believe it!" cried the haughty Maud, angrily. "She simply throws herself at his head. Every-

body knows that, and he naturally needs her money, so Mrs. Charles is artfully trying to make the match."

"Maud, you know that Julian Charles is incapable of marrying any woman for mere money, and I happen to know that he is madly in love with Carolyn, and that she will not allow him to speak yet."

"And, he never shall! That I vow!" cried the flashing-eyed fury. "There is Gus Kendricks and old Goodwin, they are both after her money bags!"

"Stop there, Maud, you know that is false, for Col. Goodwin is wealthy and there is a well-grounded report that he is engaged to a distinguished widow in Washington. You were always meanly jealous of Carolyn because of her superior beauty and popularity. This is your old hatred."

"How dare you, Philip; it is false!" cried Maud, starting up angrily; but, her blushes told that the mark was fairly hit.

"Children, children, what is the matter?" said the peaceful Mrs. Hastings, appearing on the scene in time to quell the storm. The clash was a bitter one.

"Maud, I am surprised at you for speaking so rudely to your brother. Go to your room, for Laura is waiting to fit on your new evening dress, and you must now decide about the style of the draperies—go, dear."

"Mother, you always champion Philip. Everyone is so partial to him." And, with a burst of bitter tears, Maud fled away from the room.

Mrs. Hastings was a gentle, simple, little woman, and was the prototype of her idolized son.

"Mother, I shudder when I think of our Maud's future; I fear that only unhappiness is in store for her; she is so rebellious, so unreasonably jealous, and so hard of heart. Would that I could influence and shield her! It's no use. I fear that she thinks too much of my friend Julian, and he surely loves no one except Carolyn Howard. His destiny is fixed as the pole star!"

The mother sighed sadly as she caressed her anxious boy. "Would that it could be otherwise, Philip; for if Maud was only happily mated I think that her disposition would soon become softened and she would be far happier. Ah, me! if we could only shape our children's destinies!"

The gentle mother's heart was sorely troubled.

That night a marvelous comet suddenly appeared in the heavens! It reached half way across the blue sky and was wonderful for its soft brilliancy. A heavenly visitor. The simple negroes were almost frightened to death, thinking that it portended the coming end of the world.

They fervently prayed and excitedly shouted and held protracted prayer-meetings at the slave quarters all over the country.

The poor, superstitious wretches now expected to hear the blast of Gabriel's trumpet every moment, and either be devoured in fiery flames or caught up into the skies, according to faith and works.

Many local prophets predicted war, bloodshed and dire calamities; while yet others said that great national events were soon to take place.

Philip Hastings, well poised in his mind, felt no uneasiness one way or the other, about this strange occurrence as he stood hidden under the vine-embowered window of his divinity, Nina Blake.

Beneath the fiery tail of the aerial monster, with the soft moonlight streaming down around him he stood with the sweet incense of southern flowers around him. He had a guitar in his hand and he touched it lightly and began to sing in a clear pure tenor voice:

"Oh! the lone starry hours give me, Love,
When still is the beautiful night,
When the round, laughing moon I see, Love,
Peep through the clouds' silver light!

When no winds through the low woods sweep, Love,
And I gaze on some bright, rising star,
When the world is in dreams and in sleep, Love,
Oh! wake while I touch my guitar!"

A shutter opened just a wee bit above him and a bouquet of roses was dropped into his arms.

"Nina! Nina, dearest!" he called rapturously.

"Yes, Philip," cooed a woman's low voice, attuned in passion.

"You will attend the races next week, won't you? You must see the tournament."

"Certainly, Philip. I will go with Mrs. Charles and Julian in Judge Howard's carriage. I go with Carolyn. You are to be one of the knights, are you not, Phil?"

"Yes, Nina, and I mean to win and crown my own queen, for Julian will not be able to take part in the contest, and he alone could compete with me. Nina, dear give me an amulet to wear on my breast and I will surely win!" he eagerly plead.

"What shall it be, Philip, and what character will you represent?" She was loving and eager.

"Ah, that is my secret; and as for the amulet, a lock of your bonnie brown hair is what I crave."

"Oh, Philip!" came the agitated whisper of the reluctant beauty. But soon, with a flutter like a tiny night bird's wings, an offering came down through the air and rested on his breast, lovingly. It was a knot of ribbon blue tied to a soft brown curl, and Philip's lover heart bounded.

"Thank you, darling. Thank you!" he cried delightedly, as he pressed it to his lips in the starlight.

"Rather let me thank you for the serenade, Philip. Please sing me one more song! Oh, it is so sweet to be awakened in the moonlight and to hear the voice of the very one you were dreaming of singing near you!"

"Nina, Nina darling, were you dreaming of me?" he

cried, going nearer under the window. He was a Romeo in thought!

"Oh, to climb this vine and reach your lips for saying that, sweetheart!" And the enraptured lover's eyes gleamed up at her like two love-laden stars.

"Good-night, Philip!" came the quivering whisper, as the blind was softly closed and hooked within.

With a wildly beating heart, the romantic lover waked the chord into a perfect melody and sang:

"Sleeping I dream, Love!"

"My dear boy, so do I, when I can get to sleep, and especially after a hearty supper; but Philip, if you love me, cease warbling to the moon, and let my weary head rest!" said a voice from a low window near him, and then Dr. Dan stuck forth his head and laughed aloud at the discovered Philip's embarrassment. "Go on, dear boy, go on! I certainly did enjoy my serenade, and I thank you very much for the compliment," he continued, teasingly. The Doctor was soberly humorous.

"Dan! Dan!" remonstrated the meek voice of his better half within the connubial chamber. "You generally do appropriate what does not belong to you! Let Philip alone! It was all perfectly lovely, Philip," she cried in a louder key.

But, Philip had incontinently fled, and only the barking of Towser that set all the deep-mouthed hounds to baying now disturbed the solemn midnight hour.

The next week the long-talked of county races came off, and the whole country side, en masse, turned out to see them. Carriages, coaches, buggies and saddle horses were passing through the deserted town all the long day, filled with gayly dressed people, wild with excitement and on pleasure bent. For they were all of sporting blood.

The race-course was in perfect condition and, in the

high judges' stand, sat Doctor Blake, Colonel Ashmore, Colonel Goodwin, Mr. McCay and Judge Howard.

Betting men were congregated in excited groups, making up their books.

The fair dames only took a passive interest in the money results of the races; but they were laughing and chatting together, looking like great bunches of gay roses. This beauty show was the county's pride.

Mrs. Charles and Julian sat in the carriage with Carolyn and Nina.

Phil Hastings soon left Maud and his mother in their carriage to lean beside his little sweetheart awhile, and let his eyes make silent love to hers, whilst they chatted lightly of other affairs. Love's gentle artifice as old as the world. A friend soon came up to chat with Mrs. Charles, and then under the lap robe, Julian sought out Carolyn's little hand, and whispered softly, "Sweetheart, would that I were well enough to ride at this tournament. I would surely win, and then—I would crown my queen of love and beauty before the whole world. Allow me to go with you to the ball, cara mia? I can't dance yet, but I can, at least, watch over you, and you will speak to me between dances. Will you not, dear?"

"If you are quite sure that you are well enough, I will be glad to have you go, Julian. You know that your dear mother is to chaperon me," and then Carolyn slightly tried to withdraw her hand, but, he held it a gentle prisoner, sure and fast.

"Thank you, darling. It will be joy only to be near you and watch your perfect figure moving in the dance!"

The girl's face crimsoned as she said: "What a flatterer you are, dear Julian; if you keep on you will surely make me very vain. Look! The jockeys are already leading out the horses, and by Heavens, Mr. Kendricks has the impudence to adopt the Howard colors for May Queen's trappings and his jockey's cap. The green and gold do not blend very well with his scarlet and purple."

"Curse the impudent dog! If I was well I would tear those precious colors off and make him sorry that he ever stole them!" And Julian's dark eyes then blazed with a mad anger, while Carolyn laughed gayly.

Julian drew closer to her side, so that the nameless magnetism of the beautiful woman penetrated his very blood and set it to tingling wildly in his veins. A delicious, faint perfume of violets always hung about her, as though the spirits of vanished flowers nestled in her hair, on her lips, and rested on her fair and glowing breast. She wore a hunter's green cloth dress and her corsage bouquet was of yellow chrysanthemums, thus combining their heraldic colors.

"Cara mia, I beseech you to give me those yellow flowers," pleaded Julian. "See, I will give you my mother's roses," and he took the pink beauties from her lap.

"Why, Julian. I am sure gold matches perfectly with my green dress!"

"Yes, I know, everything that you wear is lovely and in perfect taste; but just to please me, an exacting invalid, do give me your breast bouquet."

So, she laughingly unfastened it and pinned on the roses in their place. He thanked her, and, handing the discarded flowers to Philip, said, "Please, Hastings, present these to your sister, with my compliments, and ask her to wear them, for they will so become her brunette beauty."

Philip accepted them with some surprise, and then as Carolyn stared at Julian in astonishment, he said, "Don't you see, Cara mia, I can't bear for you to wear the colors that dastardly Kendricks has stolen for even this one day?"

"Oh! you jealous creature," laughed Carolyn.

"The great God Himself is a jealous God; how can you expect me to be stronger, darling?" he whispered tenderly, as he almost crushed her hand in his.

Carolyn whispered, "Hush, Julian, that is sinful! See, the races are about to begin."

After two very good races had been run and the crowd warmed up to a fine glow of excitement, the racing event of the year, the famous Camptown Sweepstakes, was called.

The three beautiful blood horses were in splendid shape for the race, and eager to begin their strife, as the jockeys rode them briskly on parade around the course, and the excited crowd cheered their favorites wildly.

The ladies all stood up in their carriages sympathetically waving handkerchiefs.

The three county cracks were beauties! After the last whispered orders the small impish-looking negro jockeys drew up their mounts at the post, the bell was tapped and the wild cry "They are off! They are off!" resounded on every side.

There was a fortune on the result. But, Lightfoot had started false, and so the bell called them all back to make a fair start.

Black Prince was on the inside, the red lights flashing from his wild eyes. Then a yell arose, they were off, at last!

Neck to neck the trained beauties bounded on, the little black jockeys looking like monkeys as they clung to the saddles and leaned forward on the racers' necks.

Augustus Kendricks was in the judges' stand, his stern face pale with excitement as Black Prince, urged madly, shot far ahead of May Queen in the first round.

"Black Prince wins! Hurrah! Black Prince!" hoarsely yelled the crowd. Many bitter hisses and groans were heard amid the loud cheering, even the grave judges lost control of their tongues as every one of Kendricks' own friends had bet heavily on May Queen as a dead sure thing!

Colonel Ashmore was purple with a growing excitement, and Dr. Dan bounded up and down like a rubber

ball, as May Queen, her head loose at last, gained slowly on Black Prince, and then shot past him with a burst.

"Oh, there she goes, the little beauty!"

Frantic yells of "May Queen! May Queen!" resounded on the golden air, as the dainty filly ran in under the wire a sure winner at least two lengths ahead of her smoking rivals!

Long and loud was the storm of cheering, as the blue ribbon was then tied to the victor's bridle, and her reeking form was quickly wrapped in a soft blanket.

Lucky Kendricks had won another county cup, besides a heavy cash purse.

It was well for Julian's bank account that his mother had persuaded him not to bet, for he would have put his money on Colonel Goodwin's horse, Black Prince, and lost all, merely to spite his enemy.

The winners all shook hands with a proud satisfaction, and hastily gathered around Kendricks to noisily congratulate him upon the victory of his matchless blood mare. Her rivals were fairly beaten.

Then there were a series of trotting races, gentlemen's cross country race, and then the famous old gander pulling sport was arranged. It afforded great amusement to the common masses, but not much real fun for the poor gander!

Its neck was first plucked and then thoroughly greased and it was then swung aloft just in reach of the dashing rider's uplifted hand.

Eight men were well horsed, and as they rode, one at a time, at full speed past the suspended gander they would each make a grab at its wriggling head. The poor captive showed fight and its downfall was much harder to accomplish than a looker-on would suppose. The well-greased neck would slip so easily through the rider's hand, and the crowd of merry on-lookers would shout with wildest laughter at these ridiculous failures. Once the brave old bird even unhorsed a reckless rider,

who sprang too high and was too confident, the slippery neck shot through his grasp and left him sprawling prone upon the ground, whilst his runaway horse kicked up its heels and soon disappeared.

But, finally, the tortured gander was released from suffering as its head was roughly pulled off at last, and the victorious rider was awarded the succulent goose and a fairly filled purse of gold.

Lastly came the tournament of the youthful chivalry, and six valiant knights, in armor proudly dressed, with helmets and waving plumes on their heads, and long lances grasped in their nervous hands, rode forth on richly caparisoned horses of finest breed, looking as brave as those loyal knights of old who rode abroad to adjust human wrongs and won laureled honors for their ladies. Those were the brave days of vanished romance, when next to God, fair woman was loyally worshiped.

Each gallant young knight represented some historic character.

Brass rings were swinging from tall poles set at intervals all around the race course, and whilst riding at full speed, each knight essayed to catch the rings on his lance, and he who took the largest number of rings was the victor in this game of skill, and won the right to crown his own selected fair one as queen of love and beauty.

On a snow-white horse, caparisoned in black velvet, richly embroidered in gold, rode a royal Ivanhoe, and on his breast he wore a knot of ribbon blue with something dark beneath it. He was a star of this band of the flower of the sunny south.

Almost breathless with a secret excitement, Nina Blake leaned far out of the carriage and waved her little lace handkerchief in a private signal as the ladies all shouted applause.

The knights reined up in splendid line and saluted them, with grace, turning to every side.

Sir Wilfred of Ivanhoe's salute, waving his slender pinioned lance at the Howard carriage, made Nina sink back under the lap robe, her glowing face the color of the pink roses which Carolyn wore at her breast, and thereupon Julian and Carolyn teased her most unmercifully.

Never did the gentlemen of Carolina ride with a more courtly grace or catch the delicately poised rings with more dexterity than was now accomplished by those six gallant knights all bedight in feudal garments gay.

When every ring was down at last, and the six breathless riders drew up before the judges' stand to have their trophies duly counted it was found that Sir Ivanhoe won the right to crown his chosen lady as queen.

Amid the thundering applause he removed the face piece of the masking helmet, and then Philip Hastings' handsome, flushed face was revealed, as wild cheers greeted him, and Miss Nina was proclaimed the queen of love and beauty.

That night the ballroom was a scene of oriental beauty, with its hundreds of wax tapers, garlands, bowers and palmetto trees. The whole aristocracy of the county gathered in the Assembly Hall.

The string band was discoursing its witching melodies in the gallery, and, old Jack, the factotum of fashion, with his sonorous voice, called out the figures in the cotillion in the quaint olden fashion.

No more stately dames, sylph like beauties, nor gallant gentlemen cavaliers ever glided through the majestic steps of the minuet in the vanished, brave days of old, than appeared to grace the scene that night. They were the flowers of the old Southland—brave men and witching women.

Carolyn Howard wore a dress that her revolutionary great-grandmother, a belle of note, had been decked out in at the first reception given to President George Washington.

It was of matchless ivory brocaded silk, with a garniture of priceless old laces, and the family rubies flashed like fire clasped around her superb throat and banded on her beautiful arms. Their fellows were set in the immense antique gold comb that surmounted her coronet of bronzed hair.

Mrs. Charles was loyally escorted by the watchful Colonel Ashmore, and she veritably looked a stately Castilian Señora, with the lambent fire of youth still gleaming in her midnight eyes.

Peachbloom Nina Blake was as fair as a winsome Peri, robed in a gown of gauzy tissue, floating along lightly in the mazes of the dance, clasped in the victorious Philip's arms. He had reverently crowned her as the queen of love and beauty, and together they led in the dances; for she was the uncontested queen of these halcyon hours.

"Nina, darling, you are as exquisitely lovely to-night as a golden butterfly. I am almost afraid to open my arms for fear you might escape me!" whispered the enamored Philip, bending low to reach her rosy ear. Her head sank lower down against his throbbing breast, and she could hear the very pulses of his heart.

They swept lightly on dancing amid the flowers and palms, and forgetting that any one else existed on earth, for love ruled their beating hearts.

"Nina, little sweetheart, I love you more than all the world! Be my partner for all time, and let us make a merry dance of life! Darling, will you be my wife?" His soul was in his eyes.

Oh, those tripping feet did not keep pace with the bounding heart in the happy queen's breast!

"I have crowned you my queen of love and beauty, give me the right to crown you now with my eternal love as the queen of my heart and soul! Answer me, sweetheart. It is for ever and aye!"

"Oh, Philip!" came the tremulous murmur, for the little Peri could not find words in her rapture.

"Look up, little one, and let your eyes answer me!" he plead. The charm was wrought!

She lifted her radiant, love-lighted eyes up to his own, and then her soul gave him an angel's answer.

They were standing near a sheltering bower of flowers and fragrant vines and the eager Philip guided her within it.

The seraphs of Heaven would have stopped their music one moment to have witnessed their supreme joy as she was folded close to her gallant lover's breast and received the first long, long kiss of a lover's passion and promise upon her willing lips.

Carolyn Howard was promenading slowly with Julian Charles, and she had unwittingly glanced within the lover's bower. Carolyn flushed a deep crimson and moved away with noiseless steps and Julian hastily followed. "Cara mia!" he cried, catching her floating laces. "Stop! there are other nooks vacant! Oh, my queen of love, let me now have a few moments of heavenly bliss to pay for all the tortures you have caused me to suffer in the long past! Do not put me off again, for, I must now tell you of my love!"

The officious Mr. Kendricks came blundering along toward them, eagerly crying, "I have searched for you everywhere, Miss Howard—this is our dance!"

It was anything but a heavenly joy that poor Julian felt, as she bowed her stately head in a noblesse oblige, and glided away on Kendricks' arm—he had lost his regal Idalia, and she was on his enemy's arm!

As he looked so faint and heart-weary, his watchful mother insisted upon their departure. With a tortured heart, he was compelled to leave, and thus one more opportunity was lost.

"God, Himself, can not give us back our lost opportunities!"

Julian Charles brooded in a sad misgiving. Kendricks had won the cup under the Howard colors; he had robbed him of the belle of the county ball, and it was the wound of his rival, the victor gamester, that took him, an exile, from the splendid scene, defeated—and half despairing!

CHAPTER VI.

A FOX HUNT! POOR EREBUS! THE BREATH OF SUSPICION!

A few weeks after the exciting races Dr. Dan and Col. Ashmore arranged for an old-time fox chase, a la Dixie's Land.

The meet was to be at the Hermitage covers, Colonel Ashmore's old colonial home, where sly Reynard loved to nest himself.

Kendricks and Julian Charles had been persuaded, at last, to meet on this neutral social ground, and both the antagonists were to be there artfully surrounded by Philip and Maud Hastings, Mr. McCay, Carolyn Howard, Nina Blake and Mrs. Charles. This friendly bodyguard was ample.

The widowed chaperon still sat her horse superbly, and she followed the hounds with as much enjoyment as when she was twenty years younger. For she was of the good old ante-bellum order.

The moon was full and radiant at ten o'clock, and the crystalline air was crisp and invigorating.

The winding horns musically answered to distant calls, and the baying of far away hounds was as sweetest music in the jovial huntsmen's ears.

The guests met promptly in Colonel Ashmore's dining-room to partake of the bountiful supper, after which

the impatient, champing horses were led around to the front and quickly mounted.

Old York then handed to each a well-fortified stirrup-cup, and, holding his glass aloft, Colonel Ashmore cried:

"Here's to luck in the chase and luck in love!" The spirited toast was hotly applauded and eagerly drank by all, and then fretting horses were given rein, and the whole hunt galloped off.

Dr. Dan led the way with his celebrated hounds; they were wildly excited and warmed up to the chase as they bounded on through the forest, the riders following eagerly in their wake. It was a rattling ride!

The dogs soon struck a scent and, barking, yelping and baying in deep chorus, they flew along in search of Master Reynard.

Carolyn Howard, superbly mounted on her "Erebus," shot ahead of the field like a young Diana leading on the chase. Julian put spurs to his horse, and catching up with her, said anxiously, "Carolyn, don't ride so recklessly, for God's sake, it is very dangerous dashing through these woods at night."

Her only answer was a saucy laugh and a sharp cut to Erebus. The blow sent him forward at a swifter pace, for he brooked no punishment.

The hounds then suddenly paused, and lifting up their heads, gave out, in a howl, the joyful tidings that the trail was struck; then, pell-mell, the chafing horses followed the frantic dogs after the prey.

Kendricks alone could keep up with Carolyn, mounted as he was, and, disappointed and anxious, Julian fell back beside Maud Hastings. His horse was not in it!

"It is strange how Carolyn always manages to get Mr. Kendricks beside her," said Maud Hastings in her rich, insinuating voice, as they rode on. Julian made no reply. It jarred upon him.

The trail was now lost, and the hounds were running around, yelping loudly, searching hither and thither.

Dr. Dan then called to old "Steadfast," a veteran hound, and hied him on. The noble old animal nosed the ground, whining anxiously, and then, with a grand yelp of triumph, he was off, going deeper into the forest with the following pack of hounds and the eagerly excited riders all at his heels. Across an open space there was seen a flash; it was Reynard himself, and wild with excitement all rushed on, not noting that Carolyn's horse had sprung into a quaking bog and gone down headlong with his dauntless rider.

But, her lover was near her! Julian's eyes of love saw her plight, and as pale as death he was soon standing beside her. Kendricks, who was just behind Carolyn also reached them as soon as Julian sprang from his horse and leaned over her. "Carolyn, are you hurt?" both cried in anxious fear. The girl struggled to free herself.

"Not at all, gentlemen," she answered, but her heart was wildly beating.

"I am only a little jarred by the fall, but I fear that poor Erebus is badly hurt!"

She took no notice whatever of Gus Kendricks outstretched hands, but grasping both of Julian's pulled herself up; his hands were as cold as ice and he trembled from head to foot with fear for his beloved.

Kendricks easily consoled himself with the thought that she did not see his hands in the shadow, so he bent over to examine Erebus. The poor horse was quivering with intense agony. Kendricks looked around for a piece of dry fat pine and quickly lighted it. "Can I trouble you, Mr. Charles, to hold the torch?" he asked, with a forced politeness.

Julian bowed and silently took it from his hand, while Carolyn, pale and distressed, knelt beside the wounded

Erebus, patting and kissing his noble head. He was doomed!

The intelligent animal gazed entreatingly into the eyes of his beautiful young mistress, causing big tears to flow down her white rose cheeks.

Her jaunty little hunting cap had been knocked off and lay crushed under their feet, while all her wealth of gold-brown hair fell in a royal robe around her.

She looked a reigning forest queen!

"I am sorry to say, Miss Howard, that Erebus has seen his last fox chase! The right fore leg is badly broken at the knee, and also below it, and the shoulder is dislocated," was Gus Kendricks' verdict after a thorough examination. "He is gone up!"

"Oh, my poor, poor Erebus; must you die?" cried Carolyn in passionate grief. She flung herself across the horse's neck sobbing, "Oh, Erebus, we have had such happy times together! We have loved each other so long! Will I never mount you again and feel you quivering with impatience to be off and then see your beautiful eyes almost shooting fire and your nostrils proudly dilating, as we bound so lightly and gayly along the woodland path? My poor friend. Oh, Erebus! Erebus!"

Almost human then looked up the eyes of the faithful animal as she spoke.

Julian was affected at the fair woman's grief, whilst Kendricks bit his lip to keep back his own curses, as he saw Carolyn's sorrow. He could never bear to see a woman weep, rough man though he was. He was a sybarite, and emotional, hot-blooded tyrant as he was at heart.

"Miss Howard," he said, gently, "you had better let me put the poor beast out of his misery—he suffers intensely."

"You shoot my horse!" almost screamed Carolyn,

quickly rising to her knees. "Never! Never! Never! Oh, Erebus!" and again she bent down to him.

Afar was heard the wild cheering and the triumphant notes of the baying hounds which told that poor Reynard was at last captured and dispatched.

Julian bent over the grief-stricken girl and whispered, "Cara mia, it must be done! Erebus will never be able to stand again—he suffers terribly. Let it all be over before the merry-makers return; they have killed the fox and will soon be back this way."

Carolyn then lifted her head and gazed sadly, intently, into the dumb creature's suffering eyes.

"Then, if it must be, I will do it myself; no one else shall!" she sighed.

"Good-bye, dear, faithful friend! May I some day meet you in a happy hunting ground!" She caressed him again and leaned down and kissed the white star in his forehead, then arose calmly and drew her own pistol from its case in her belt.

She was a fine shot, and knew just where to find the vital spot. She raised her arm steadily and cocked the pistol, and for a single moment closed her eyes and shuddered. Kendricks and Charles both stood beside her, both suffering for her. With an effort she straightened herself, looked once more at her horse, and then fired.

The ball went home, and the mysterious germ of life fled the quivering flesh forever. Her poor old thoroughbred was out of pain.

The happy riders were near and they had all heard the shot; they had soon missed the three young companions, but felt no uneasiness until that one clear shot rang out loudly on the evening air. Each with different conjectures spurred back, swaying uneasily on their horses. Colonel Ashmore, who was in the lead, riding beside Mrs. Charles, cried, "My God! those mad boys will yet murder each other!" and he lashed his horse into

a quick gallop; his silent companion followed, with white frightened face, and they soon reached the scene of the disaster.

"Julian, my boy, what is it?" the mother cried, and, then, seeing poor Erebus' lifeless form, she drew up and sprang lightly from her horse. She caught Carolyn to her heart as the poor girl was trembling in exhaustion.

"Darling, what has happened? I am so sorry for you!" she cried, amid her womanly kisses, whilst Julian quickly explained the accident to the eager crowd that drew around them. It was the one shadow on the merry chase.

Maud Hastings, flushed and triumphant, had fastened the heavy gold-red fox brush in her cap. She had been in at the death beside Dr. Dan, and so he had presented this valued trophy of the chase to her.

Everyone had words of sympathy for Carolyn. Julian begged her to ride home on his own horse and allow him to lead it; but she, knowing that he was not strong enough for such a long tramp, declined his courtesy most positively, and at Nina's insistence, she rode double with her; the gray nag, seeming to feel the importance of her precious freight, stepped out with demure dignity, and all the hunters, a little saddened, soon reached the "Hermitage," there to rest and refresh themselves.

Old York met them at the door beaming a welcome "Walk in, ladies and gem'mens, de punch am waitin' patien'ly an' de supper am hot! Yes-sa, walk right in, Mars' Henry! Walk in, Miss Ma'y! I makes you all welcome!" Thus greeted by the Colonel's factotum, they made a rush for the roaring hall fire.

Colonel Ashmore felt the greatest pride in the "Hermitage," his grand old colonial home, with its richly wooded park and extensive grounds of still virgin forests amid its broad acres of cultivated fields.

The red bricks of which it was built had been brought over in the sailing vessels from merry England long be-

fore the Revolutionary War. Six men could have ridden their horses abreast up the staircase of solid oak, and a Chinese Mandarin could have made a promenade of the broad banister. In the wide hall was an open fireplace, large enough to accommodate the butt of a California redwood, and above the lofty mantle shelf was carved this inscription in old English:

> "Reste and peace doo heer abyde,
> Wythe love and comforte bye their syde."

The carved pillars that supported the mantle stood out far enough to admit two cosy ingle nooks. When alone, Colonel Ashmore occupied one of these with his pipe, and old York waited at the other, and there the great house mastiff would lie on the tiger skin rug between them, a picture of solid comfort and content. The hallowed old hearth side.

The window seats were all broad and low and the casements lofty. The entire manor house was royally fashioned for a dignified life of social ease.

A symphony in brick, stone and wood. As some one had quaintly said the architecture was "frozen music," and its noble proportions shone out grandly, set in the dim, silent, old woods around.

Maud Hastings walked up to the roaring fire that rolled away in blue and yellow flames, darting up the broad-throated chimney, and then she placed one high arched foot on the brass fender. She looked a stately queen and provokingly handsome in her black, close-fitting habit, and its velvet cap, from which fell to her shoulder poor Reynard's reddish brush. She was a very Venus Victrix!

Philip and Nina had managed to find one of the ingle seats large enough for two, and were oblivious to all, carrying on an animated conversation, sotto voce. The blindness of lovers!

Colonel Ashmore was trying to persuade Mrs. Charles

and Carolyn to remain all night, owing to the accident, and as the hour was late.

Dr. Dan, Mr. McCay and Mr. Kendricks were already wreathed in tobacco smoke at one end of the hall, discussing the exciting coming election. So Julian, left alone, strayed over to Maud's side.

"What a lovely picture you make in the firelight, Miss Maud, with this beautiful old mantle for the frame, and the gold flames as the background. What a pity that Colonel Ashmore cannot keep this vision in his lordly hall forever."

"Oh, I thank you very much. I would prefer a different fate and a very different master. Miss Howard also made a most pathetic picture to-night," she sneered with curling lip, "but, Carolyn Howard always manages to create a sensation!" she added viciously. "What a pity that she does not adopt the stage for a profession; she would make a really fine tragedy queen."

"Indeed!" answered Julian loyally, "I don't know what it is that Miss Howard could not do creditably and gracefully." He was innocent of her hidden taunt.

Maud shrugged her shoulders disdainfully.

"When her fortune is united with that of Mr. Kendricks she will reign in a renewed splendor, with her many slaves, blooded horses and their weighty money bags.

"Judge Howard is most anxious for this match, and they say that he has already given his formal consent to Mr. Kendricks paying court to his niece." It was gall and wormwood, but, the lover was patient!

"Indeed, I had not heard of it," said Julian, quietly, while the blood around his heart seemed to become ice—thick enough to skate on.

"Mr. Kendricks will certainly be a most fortunate man and one smiled upon by the gods. Is not a fire, such as this, the very soul of welcome and good cheer?" he asked, changing the painful subject.

He wriggled his heart away from the woman's poisoned dagger.

"Yes, indeed, the Hermitage is a lordly estate. What a pity that the Colonel does not select a mistress for it all." She was bent on gossip, this fair witch.

"Why do you not set your own cap in that direction, Miss Maud?" asked Julian, as he turned to clasp his mother's hand.

"Julian, dear, Carolyn and I have concluded to remain all night, as Colonel Ashmore insists, so you will have to go home alone, and let Becky know, for she will be waiting up and anxious. You know how faithful she is."

"Come, come friends!" cried Colonel Ashmore, hurrying in from the dining room, "we all need to refresn the inner man! Supper is now ready and the punch is getting cool. York is in despair that we do not drink it while it is hot."

So, away they all gayly trooped to the long bright dining room to a merry feast and a chorus of laughter.

Carolyn alone kept the sadness of her loss in her eyes, and in Julian's shone the suspense of his unanswered love pleas. He was alarmed and secretly troubled at Maud's chatter.

Christie McCay, like many Scotchmen of the old school, never knew when he had enough to drink, and he never admitted that he was drunk so long as he could hold on to the glass—this was his one test.

He had given his own recipe for hot Scotch punch to Colonel Ashmore, so, whenever he was to be one of the guests, this hair-lifting brew was duly prepared.

"Lord bless us with content!" cried McCay, as he refilled his own glass and pressed it to his lips. No loving woman's kiss could have been sweeter to him than that warm, fragrant punch. "Fill up your glass, dear Miss Carolyn, and drive dull care awa'," he said across the

board. "Remember what Robbie Burns said, and Burns, God gie him rest, had an inspired tongue:

"Gi'e him strong drink until he wink,
That's sinking in despair;
An' liquor guid to fire his blood,
That's prest wi' griefs an' care;
Then let him bouse, an' deep carouse,
Wi' bumpers flowing o'er,
Till he forgets his loves and debts,
And minds his griefs no more!"

McCay spoke the verse with the solemn accent of an oracle, and with his Scotch burr, and sighed most deeply, "Oh, Robbie, Robbie, you led a de'il of a life; but you were a wise one!

"E'en auld Solomon himsel' could na' think o' better advice to gi'e than that, an' I know, if you had sins like scarlet, and met auld Clootie, himsel', and had brewed him one of your aine toddies, he would ha' shaken you by the hand, and been your fast friend for aye!" The Scottish heart was fired.

"Verily! a Daniel has come amongst us," quoth the Colonel sententiously, as he patted the little Scotchman on the shoulder. They all laughed heartily and allowed York to "Fill 'em up ag'in!"

For, these were the days of deep drinking. When the gay party separated for the night and the horns had called up the hounds and pealed forth their farewell calls, the moon had gone to rest and the stars were waxing dim—a mysterious, breathless silence seemed to hang over the world, as though all nature awaited the birth of a new day.

Julian Charles slowly wended his way homeward, still under the spell of Carolyn Howard's bright eyes, and, yet, his heart winced under the skillful thrusts of Maud Hastings' cruelly voiced suspicions.

The attitude and county influence of Kendricks was threatening. He was a lover whom no Carolina woman

could despise. Rich, important politically, an acknowledged leader of high-toned sport, his hospitable doors were open to all. He was both a powerful and a reckless rival.

The young lawyer thought of his upward way, all the path yet to carve out, and he grieved for the splendid patrimony recklessly thrown away by his dead father.

"Women are won by wealth, and are all fond of display. They say the woman heart is fickle. Can I trust Carolyn? She will not hear my suit. She puts it off, and yet, well she knows the story. But, she is true at heart, a woman who will play no double part!" He cast his eyes above and cried, "Fixed as the stars glittering there!" And as she spoke a bright lamp of night shot across the heavens and disappeared forever! The omen was a sinister one, and Julian Charles sighed as the night winds chilled his heart.

BOOK II—THE CURSE OF MIXED BLOOD.

CHAPTER VII.

A GREEK BEARING GIFTS! THE UNWELCOME PROPOSAL! THE SLANDERER'S POISONED TONGUE.

Miss Carolyn Howard had just reached "Sunset Manor" the next morning when a neatly liveried negro on horseback and proudly leading another superb horse entered the stable yard. There was an instant gathering crowd of the curious.

It was Jockey Sam, one of the stable boys from "River Side Plantation," who dismounted, and beaming with pride, led the dainty racing filly, "May Queen," up to the doorsteps of the mansion.

A card was tied to the winner's bridle bearing the words:

"Money could not buy me; but I come with a willing heart to be fair Carolyn's slave!"

The courtly old Judge stood beside his niece on the velvet lawn. He had been out taking his morning constitutional when she arrived on the scene.

"Bless my soul, Carolyn! Is not that Mr. Kendricks' matchless filly, 'May Queen'?" He carefully adjusted his glasses and looked again.

"Yes, Uncle James, that is May Queen. What an ex-

quisite, satiny coat she has." The Judge then went briskly forward and slowly read the card.

"Carolyn, Carolyn, my girl! Come and behold your royal present!" he cried, as he excitedly tore off the card and hurried back to meet her.

She read it with a flushed face and tightly compressed lips. "Uncle, I cannot accept such a valuable gift from any one, much less from Mr. Kendricks."

Her heart was bounding in mad unrest. She feared the pushing attentions of her reckless admirer.

"Are you mad, my girl? Any man in this country would gladly pay five thousand dollars for May Queen. Kendricks could not be led to part with her before, neither for love nor money!" stormed the delighted Judge, emphasizing his remarks by tapping the ground with his heavy gold-headed cane. His racing blood was up.

"I suppose that it is for love now," sneered Carolyn hotly. "I will not accept her, never!"

"My dear Carolyn, Mr. Kendricks is my friend. And a highly esteemed, honorable man, who only wishes to show his respect to you. He certainly could not pay a queen a greater compliment than to present her with such a treasure as May Queen."

"She, at least, is not a safe or proper mount for a lady, Uncle James," the girl hotly argued.

"Kendricks knows what he is about, child; and you know there was never yet a single horse in this broad state that you could not safely ride. Why you broke your own Erebus when he was a fire-shod colt and the terror of the stable boys."

"Uncle, Mr. Kendricks may be your friend, but I detest him, and I do not wish to accept his gift. I will not. It would make him more presumptuous than ever! He is too bold!"

"Carolyn, how long is it since you have ceased to follow my guidance?" There were tears in the voice of

the wily old gentleman. "Do I not know what is best for my own girl? You will most deeply offend me by refusing May Queen. Why she would be an honor to my stables. You are mad to think of refusing her," and the excited Judge waxed wroth with his fair niece.

"Then accept her yourself, Uncle James, for I will have no more to say on the subject!" and then catching up her riding skirts, she proudly marched into the house, with head erect and flashing eyes. It was a woman's revolt.

And then the irate Judge penciled a card to be sent back to Squire Kendricks:

"The 'fair Carolyn' will accept your royal gift most gratefully." He gave it to the grinning Sam with a broad silver piece for his trouble, and then the old aristocrat himself led the long coveted prize away to the stable yard, and strictly cautioned old Jeff to house the dainty creature in his snuggest stall.

So, it was a house divided.

Augustus Kendricks was, therefore, highly elated at the cordial acceptance of his gift; for surely she would also accept the master if she used the horse.

He dressed himself with a wooer's greatest care that very afternoon, and duly rode over to pay his court to the lady of his choice.

He was told that Miss Carolyn had gone for a walk in the pine forest, and so leaving his own horse with "Uncle Jeff," he went in search of her. His personal future was wrapped in rosy gleams.

It was nearing the sunset hour; the ruddy gold of the western sky touched the red and yellow of the swaying forest trees into a sublimity beyond the reach of a Titian's brush. The great dark plumes of the pine trees seemed all enwrapped in veils of golden tissue.

The air was just crisp enough to make the hot blood bound through the young planter's veins, and make the lover feel as if the wine of Phœbus had been quaffed in

great flagons of magic elixir, until simply to live was a joy. It was a most propitious hour.

Carolyn Howard stood musing on a little knoll in an opening gazing in a silent rapture at the sunset—her tall, lithe form was outlined against the radiant clouds, and the departing rays of the sun glorified her graceful figure.

Kendricks, flushed with a coming triumph, as he beheld her waiting him there, and he quickened his eager paces.

"Carolyn!" he cried, intensely, as he reached her side. "What a very goddess of love you look, crowned by Apollo himself!" and then he grasped her slender hand and lifted it to his lips.

The musing beauty started in sudden affright.

"Ah, Mr. Kendricks, what a most uncomfortable method you have of surprising people," and then she smartly withdrew her hand as the rapturous expression of her day dream faded from her face.

"I am sorry if I am such an unpleasant surprise. I want to thank you for accepting my May Queen, and I hope it only forebodes a fate as enviable for her former owner."

"It was my uncle who accepted the gift, Mr. Kendricks, not I," cried Carolyn, as ungraciously as her womanly courtesy would allow.

"Ah! that is most cruel of you, Carolyn; in fact, you are always needlessly cruel to me. Fate does not cast the rose-colored lights of fortune over me when you are near!

"Ah! Carolyn! believe me, I would make you a queen among women, and I would be always your most devoted slave!" He grew deeply earnest and grasped her hand firmly. The tide of his stormy passion was rising!

"Mr. Kendricks, I have no desire to own any more slaves, nor to be a modern queen. Can't you understand that I can never have reciprocated your affection,

nor will I ever accede to your wishes?" She turned her flushed and beautiful face and looked him deep in the eyes. The firmness of her soul spoke from their glowing depths.

"Carolyn, you drive me mad, and before God, I swear that you shall yet love me! I love you; I love you, madly! I am thrilled with a burning desire to clasp you whenever I look upon you, or breathe the very atmosphere around you. I love you above all things on earth or in Heaven!" his voice trembled in eagerness.

"Don't you know that such men as I never take a woman's first No for an answer?" His breath was coming pantingly from his hot lips, and his eyes shone dangerously.

He was not merely the suppliant now.

"You forget yourself, sir!" said Carolyn Howard, haughtily, "such women as I am can never be bullied, and they never brook insult!" and her dark eyes flashed angrily back a woman's proud defiance.

"Carolyn Howard, you shall not lightly play with me. I swear before God that I will yet master you!"

And, then, the passion mad man caught her roughly in his arms and suddenly clasped her to his breast.

She resisted, struggling wildly, but what is even a strong woman's untrained force when pitted against an athletic man's fury, and one suddenly fired to frenzy? Her two hands were pinioned, held in one of his own, and then drawing her backwards on his breast with his freed arm, he fastened his burning lips to her own. They neither heard nor saw a horsewoman who dashed by them on the near highway, and Maud Hastings was just in time to see that long and seemingly unresisted kiss.

Carolyn was dumb with a sudden rage and loathing horror. She could not even realize what had happened until his ravishing lips had clung to hers and placed a kiss there such as never before had sullied their purity.

Her whole womanly soul revolted against the brutal insult, and she hated the trespasser upon her innocence.

Though she felt that she could have killed him then and there, in spite of that the young, fresh blood rushed madly through her veins.

A sudden vertigo burned in her head; she grew almost blind, and with a frightened cry she clenched her hand and struck her insulter again and again in his face, pressed so near her own.

He quickly released her and then sank upon his knees at her feet. He felt that he had outraged her high-born pride.

She reeled back and hissed through her teeth, "I could kill you for that! Never, never speak to me again, you coward brute! Never come near me at your peril! I loathe you! I despise you!" and then, she turned and fled homeward, leaving him there stunned and half repentant.

When she had locked herself in her room the orphaned girl fell across her bed in a tempest of tears and sobs.

"My God! My God! to think of my lips being so contaminated!" she wailed. Her lips still burned and quivered under the insulter's touch, and her proud heart beat wildly; and she hid her guilty head beneath her pillow as the thought of the scene would come back unbidden. She had been profaned as a desecrated altar.

"Oh, if it had only been Julian who placed that first kiss of passion on my lips how my soul would have sprung up to meet it. My own brave lover! Julian! Ah! if he only knew of this brute's deed he would murder the despoiler, who stole the purity from my unwilling lips forever!"

What triumph that observing horsewoman, Maud Hastings, felt in her heart as she dashed on homeward, laughing aloud in glee whenever that passionate scene arose before her eyes.

"Oh, my lady, I have you now! Julian Charles shall

know of this ere twenty-four hours have passed; then see what will become of your coquettish dreams. Fast and loose!"

"Philip, I have great news for you," she cried, excitedly, as her brother hastened to assist her to dismount. "News to surprise—even you."

"You certainly do manage to hear more news than any one that I ever saw, Maud! What is it now? Some rolled up ball of second-hand tattle?"

"Oh, this is not a case of hearsay, Philip; my own eyes witnessed it. Come in to the sitting room fire, I am chilled from my long ride," and the rosy Hebe shivered, but her eyes were bright and beaming from satisfaction.

"Maud, how many times have I requested you never to go riding into the back country without a groom to properly attend you. It is neither safe nor proper, and I forbid it hereafter."

"Oh, fudge! You forbid it! I like that. However, come on! I am burning to tell my secret. The fine secret one! My Lady Disdain! Well, Philip, what do you think, Carolyn Howard and Gus Kendricks are engaged at last!"

"Oh, rot! that I know is false! Carolyn would not even look at Kendricks," cried Philip, disgustedly. "Tell me some other ghost story!"

"Then if they are not engaged they should be; for as I rode through the forest road near the Manor, who should I see but Gus Kendricks holding your immaculate Carolyn Howard in his arms and energetically kissing her! What do you think of that, Mr. Philip?" and the girl laughed delightedly. "They were both in such a trance of bliss, I suppose, that they neither saw nor heard me! They were company enough for each other! There's your Miss Sly Boots!"

"Maud, it can't be true!" exclaimed Philip, turning pale. He feared his sister's triumphant face.

"Philip, I do not lie, and that you do know. I will swear that I saw Carolyn in Kendricks' arms and their lips were pressed together. They will not dare to deny it. I will brave them both. What is more, I learn from Tom, who was at the Howards this morning, that Mr. Kendricks has formally presented 'May Queen' to Carolyn to ride in the place of the horse that was shot last night." And then, Maud turned her sparkling eyes victoriously upon Philip and laughed aloud.

"Great God! can Carolyn Howard have fallen so low as to marry such a ruffian, such a licentious brute, for his money alone! This will kill poor Julian!" Philip saw the white breakers ahead.

"Oh, I guess that he will survive! He is a man after all. He will not grieve out his heart over a baby-faced girl who would so easily sell herself!" sneered Maud.

Her brother's face grew dark and stern. "Maud, I hope this is no devilish wicked concoction of yours?" he cried doubtingly, "for it would be an unpardonable offense against God and man!"

"Are you crazy, Philip Hastings?" the girl cried with anger. "I will swear on the Bible that what I say is true! Go and ask Mr. Kendricks yourself, then, if you don't believe your sister's oath!"

"I will, indeed, sift the whole matter thoroughly, for poor Julian's sake," he growled, and Philip then quickly left the room.

Hastily ordering his horse he was soon flying along the road in the direction of "River Side Plantation." It was quite dark when he reached there, but he was at once ushered into the smoking room, where the half tipsy Kendricks welcomed him most warmly. He had not long returned from his exciting interview with Carolyn and had revived the inner man by copious libations of brandy.

"Ah, Hastings, old fellow! Welcome! You are just

in the nick-o'-time," and the host rang a bell which was promptly answered by a young mulatto girl.

She was as attractive looking in the fire-lighted room as a rare Moorish statue would be. She was a slender, brown creature, with sorrow-haunted, gleaming eyes, and long, black hair, over which was tied a glowing bit of scarlet silk. A string of golden beads surrounded her neck, and she wore a red wool dress and an old blue kerchief folded across her breast.

Kendricks turned his gloating eyes leisurely upon her, and said:

"Don't be afraid. Come in here for my orders! Get Mr. Hastings a glass and then bring in some hot water and lemons. Be quick, Evelina!"

The timid girl fled away to do his bidding, and Kendricks slapped Hastings on the shoulder, crying, "Is she not as tempting as a wild strawberry? I bought this beauty three weeks ago from a slave dealer I have known for some years. He had promised me to keep his eye open to find just such a rare bird for me, and a pretty long price I had to pay for her, too!"

"She is, indeed, a nice enough looking girl, Kendricks, but I should think that you have slaves enough by this time. Slave property is, after all, a sad enough investment. Sometimes sad; often bad!"

"Enough! Never enough of such girls as she!" laughed her owner, leering coarsely. "She looks small and timid, but she has just a devil of a temper. I haven't conquered her yet; but I will, or I'll break her stiff neck! There was an old black crone with her, whom she calls Granny, and I had to buy her also to get the girl away from her arms. She is a young tiger cat. Evelina will make a picturesque maid for my lady by and by. And, I'll smooth her down, that I will!"

Hastings flushed and his closed fist ached to knock the insolent ruffian down then and there. "And so you

are contemplating matrimony, Kendricks?" he forced himself artfully to ask.

"Indeed, that I am, old fellow. I thought that everyone now knew my intentions toward the fair Carolyn Howard. God, she is a queen! The Judge openly favors my suit. That ends it! By the way, I presented May Queen to my lady this morning; they will make a glorious pair to draw to! Nothing like the two in South Carolina!" And Kendricks rubbed his hands delightedly, and flushed a deeper red, only to think of the peerless beauty he hoped to win.

"Indeed!" and Philip's heart sunk down into his boots. "I should certainly fancy your suit is settled if Miss Howard accepted your valuable racer. There is always an obligation with a present of that value."

"Settled? Of course! She knows if she has accepted the horse, she must also take the master.

"By heavens, she is a treasure worth winning!"

"Then, you really are to marry Miss Howard?" Philip questioned, with a forced calm.

The happy Kendricks smiled knowingly and replied, "I hope to very soon establish my queen in her new realm!" and then, with a sigh of satisfaction, Kendricks lifted the brandy flask as the slave girl entered the room bearing a silver tray.

With a devilish, taunting laugh Kendricks sprang up to meet her, and chucking her familiarly under the chin, sang noisely:

> "Sweet Evelina, the last time I seen her,
> She had a verbena,—stuck in her hair!"

The poor girl shuddered and was on the point of dropping the whole tray; as it was the pitcher of hot water fell and was broken to bits.

"Look out, there, you little devil!" shouted Kendricks, jumping back. "You came very near scalding my foot! Go at once and fetch me more hot water."

She fled away with the haunted look of a fawn, dashing onward from its wolfish pursuer's fangs, and presently an old negress toddling along bore in the desired hot water. She gazed in trembling fear upon the stern master who glared at her and cried loudly, "Why didn't Evelina return? Send her back here at once!"

The terrified old creature rolled her eyes as she quavered piteously, "Marster, the chil' done broke out cryin'. You know she is scared of you. Let de lil-gal go down to de cabin an' I will wait on you. I knows all gem'men's ways!"

"Get out, you old hell-cat! You are a great substitute for Evelina! Tell her to come back here at once. I'll skin you alive if she don't come!" and Kendricks shook his fist menacingly at the abject creature.

"Kendricks, I beg of you to make no scene!" interrupted Philip Hastings, disgustedly, a flush of shame had mounted to his noble brow.

"I can easily mix my own toddy, and besides I have only a few moments to stay. I also wish to have a few words with you alone."

"Oh, well, well! Go along then! Get out! We do not need you. I will see that stubborn young hussy later. She must learn who is her master, and, the sooner the better. Get you gone!"

The poor, old woman needed no second bidding to flee.

The chafing Philip quickly changed the subject, and skillfully brewed a glass of punch for both himself and Kendricks, trying thus to bring him down into a calmer frame of mind, but as soon as possible the visitor bade the master good-night, and with a sorrowful heart rode slowly back homeward.

He felt burdened at heart with the astonishing news which he would have to bear to his friend and partner, Julian Charles, and, he sorrowed also, because the lofty

pinnacle upon which he had placed Carolyn Howard had tottered and fallen.

So, she had stooped to conquer! He rode on to his law office when he reached the town, not caring to face the triumphant Maud's sarcasm, and have her glory over him just then. He could not go to Nina, his dear, little sweetheart in such a bitter frame of mind, for it seemed as if Carolyn, their proud, peerless Carolyn, had fallen in caste. He found the unsuspecting Julian at his office desk, hard at work on an important case for the next day. The room was filled with the young student's cigar smoke.

As the door opened, Julian glanced up and cheerily cried, "Halloo Phil! I didn't expect you back to-night," and then he gazed kindly at his friend with his bright, eager eyes full of interest and a happily flushed face. He looked a cavalier, "sans peur et sans reproche," when the mercurial Castilian blood shone out through the dark olive of his cheeks and the brave spirits of his thorough-going ancestors looked through his gleaming eyes.

"I did not intend to come back, Julian, but I have some important letters to write," answered Philip, looking sorrowfully upon his friend's eager face.

He feared to broach the unwelcome news—there was danger lurking there.

"What is the matter with you, old boy; you look all broken up?" said Julian, rising from his study to stretch himself.

"I feel much more so than I look; but go on with your work, Julian, don't let me interrupt you."

It struck Hastings that there might be a possible tragedy in an abrupt disclosure.

"I have just finished for the night, Phil. Have you and Nina had a lovers' quarrel? Come, fire away! I'll sympathize and patch it up if need be."

"No, Julian, I have not seen Nina since I left her with

her father at three o'clock this morning. I guess the dear girl is tired out. It was a pretty high old revel, a very spirited time."

"Then what is the matter? You look like the 'last act of a tragedy,' Philip, my boy! I thought of going over to see Carolyn to-night for a short while. Poor disconsolate! I know how she grieves over the loss of Erebus!" and Julian's voice grew softly tender. "She can never replace him! He was a wonder!"

An ugly sneer appeared on Philip's handsome face as he said, bitterly, the truth breaking from him: "She has consoled herself, so don't you fret!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Julian in surprise. His friend's words aroused and alarmed him.

"I mean that Mr. Augustus Kendricks sent her to-day the famous 'May Queen' as a substitute for poor Erebus, and the gift was accepted by the lady!"

"Philip, are you mad?" cried Julian, his face growing white. He clasped his friend's hands in sudden rage.

"I am positive of the truth of my assertion, Julian, for I have just left Kendricks, and I know all about it."

The young men looked into each other's eyes and Hastings turned sadly away.

Julian then sat down and laughed scornfully. "Oh, there is some stupid mistake. Carolyn would not accept such a valuable gift from any man whom she did not love and respect. She despises Kendricks."

"So thought I, Julian, my friend; but, like you, I was mistaken.

"Poor, old fellow! I hate to deal you such a blow; but you must make up your mind to forget Carolyn Howard. Put her out of your heart forever! She is not worthy a single regret."

The listener turned paler and started forward. "For God's sake explain yourself, Hastings!" cried Julian. His lips moved inaudibly, and the cigar fell from his nerveless fingers.

"Julian, I have it from Kendricks' own lips, the story that he and Carolyn will shortly be married!" and Philip reached out tender hands as Julian bounded madly up, crying, "It is a lie! A damned lie! I wouldn't believe Kendricks himself on oath!" and the man's voice grew hoarse with anguish, yet, he was sickened at heart!

"Do you think that I would deceive you, Julian? What a heartless folly—a crime! God knows, that it grieves me most deeply; but I must thrust the knife still deeper in your heart. Be brave. My sister Maud saw Carolyn in her lover's arms this very afternoon, hidden down in the forest road. She lay clasped against his breast and his lips were fondly pressed to hers. They were so lost to love that neither of them saw Maud ride silently by. When she told me I at once ordered my horse and then rode straight over to Kendricks to prove it, and, by God, it is true!" cried Philip, hoarsely.

"My God, have mercy on me!" almost shrieked Julian, as he flung himself into his chair and burying his face in his arms on the table wept like a child. "Oh, Carolyn! Carolyn! I could not have believed you so base, so false, as to sell yourself for wealth and power, to a licentious animal! Oh, God! how can I bear it?" he raved.

Philip threw his arm across Julian's quivering shoulders and smoothed his hair gently; but he had no words of comfort. The brutal blow had told in every quivering fiber.

"Oh, Phil! this will kill me! It is so heartlessly cruel! So base, so unexpected! Leave me here alone! Oh, God! how I did love my beautiful darling! Cara mia! Cara mia! I cannot believe you false. I have spent my whole life shaping it to be worthy of that woman's acceptance. I have built such stately castles in the air, and I finally dreamed that they would some happy day all be materialized. Oh, God, pity me. Leave me,

leave me, Philip, my friend. I must fight this thing out alone."

So, Hastings pityingly left the room; but his heart yearned to the strong man in his lonely agony.

For the first time in his life Julian staggered homeward several hours later intoxicated beyond the reach of grief or memory. It was the grinning devil's work! The busy, relentless devil, who always seeks his human prey!

Mrs. Charles met her son with a horror filled soul; but she forebore to question or upbraid, knowing full well that some stunning blow had befallen her boy from which he sought forgetfulness. It was the first shame of his life!

"To-morrow, to-morrow, I will know all!" she faltered, and like a marble statue she sat in a frozen calm beside the bedside of her boy, who slept heavily throughout the long, long night.

She knew not what friend had entrapped him, what devil's work had been done; but the mother's heart quivered there, as she saw the drunkard's flush stain the noble beauty of her beloved son's face.

"Is he mad?" she whispered, as in an agony she prayed to the God above to save her boy from himself.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNHAPPY BEAUTY! THE HUNTED FAWN! AN AVENGING BLOW.

It was at that mysterious solemn hour just before dawn, "the turn of the tide," when the disgraced Julian awoke to the reality of sorrow and the new grief of shame. In the gray twilight of the morning, when so

many souls go forth to meet their God, he dimly realized his fatal lapse.

An awesome feeling sometimes comes over even the bravest soldier heart, if it awake on watch at that uncanny hour, and the dread of death, and the fear of the tomb, and a sense of the shortness of this transitory life will cast dark unwelcome shadows over our trembling material bodies. There are spirits of power abroad then.

Julian's head ached terribly, and so did his convulsed heart. He slowly lifted his heavy and blood-shot eyes to encounter his noble mother's calm, strong face. "Mother, you are here?" he whispered.

"Yes, my poor boy, ever beside you in a mother's place, when needed. Tell me, Julian, what has happened? For you have surely not been your old self!"

An accusing angel would look upon a shrinking, trembling soul with the same tender love, and gentle pity, and sympathetic sorrow, as Mary Charles, whose pallid face now beamed down upon her unhappy son.

"Oh, mother, mother, forgive me! I was out of my mind when I tried to drown my life's sorrow in burning drink; but, my agony was intolerable! Yet, now it has returned two-fold; I am ruined forever!" and in rapid anguished tones he then unburdened his saddened soul to his tender mother. She was aghast.

"I can hardly believe it, Julian! Carolyn Howard has always seemed such a noble, lofty-minded girl, and I have loved her so tenderly. There is a mystery—some plot here."

"Oh, mother! there is no mistake! Carolyn, like many another vain woman, has simply sold herself to the highest market bidder! Mother, I can not, I will not remain here and endure the life to come. I must leave for awhile until the wound heals!" and then, he covered his swollen face with both hands and sobbed in a man's shame.

"Julian, dear, you have your life work yet to do!

"Your most important case is to be tried next week; how can you go dear? It would be your professional ruin!"

"Oh, mother, I will simply die if I remain! The case is all properly worked up and every detail is arranged. The clients will not suffer. Colonel Goodwin could attend to it himself, or else easily have it postponed. I feel that I will be tempted to shoot Kendricks on sight if I meet him now, and I cannot ever look on Carolyn again. I have lost my Paradise! And that woman can be false! Great God!"

"Then you should go, dear, if you can honorably arrange it so, and may God bless you! Your sorrows are mine also; but don't let this, your first great affliction, make you a weak prey of the devil! Go on winning success after success and gaining all men's golden opinions—for my sake, dear Julian. And I charge you to shun the wine cup, for it can only bring misery and disgrace. It is your mother who speaks. I will leave you now and soon send you a cup of strong coffee. Try and put that false girl out of your heart, as I shall do at once," and Mrs. Charles kissed her boy most tenderly and left him alone. She was bruised and stunned at the discovery of a false character in her human goddess.

Next day, Carolyn Howard heard, with a secret consternation, that Julian had left for Washington on important business, and he had gone without bidding her good-bye! There was a strange unrest in her proud and wounded heart.

She drove over to see Mrs. Charles for a usual friendly visit, hoping by accident to ascertain why her pledged cavalier had left so unceremoniously. To her still greater surprise, Mrs. Charles asked to be excused. There was no pretense as to the flat refusal. She had lost a lover, and made two enemies unconsciously.

Feeling hurt and wounded to the soul, Carolyn went on

further to see if steadfast Nina Blake could tell her any thing of this strange affair. Her loyal little friend greeted her most reproachfully, and after an unsuccessful effort to control herself, burst into bitter tears and then told her all.

Carolyn Howard's wrath knew no bounds, as she paced the room like an enraged tigress, her slender hands clenched and her dark eyes flashing.

"Cara mia," sobbed Nina, "please quiet down and explain everything to me. I know that there must be some terrible mistake. Some poisoned tongue!"

"Then, why did you not say so, boldly, and come to me sooner! Am I not entitled to a word of warning?"

"Because, dearest, I only heard this bitter news today. Philip called by to tell me of it, and he was so sadly grieved over Julian's great sorrow; he said he feared that it would be his ruin. You know the father's wild history."

"He deserves to lose me for his cringing doubts! Nina, Nina, I will not now explain anything, not even to you, unless you vow to tell no one—not even Philip—who also dares to doubt me! What men of little faith? I will be trusted all in all, or else not at all! Julian should have known me as utterly incapable of accepting that brute or submitting to his caresses! How they heard anything of that encounter is a mystery to me. Do you know from what source sprang this same glorious information?"

Her proud heart was writhing with just indignation! She was at bay!

"I don't know, Carolyn, for Philip would not tell me," Nina whimpered, in evident fear.

"I would just like to know and to see that particular person for a short ten minutes!" and Carolyn lifted her clenched hands and clutched at an imaginary foe.

She was no patient Griselda.

"I will never explain the details of that tableau to any

one, much less to Mr. Julian Charles, who could so easily believe me to be a vile coquette. Nina, come home with me and stay for a few days. I am lonely at soul and simply heart-sick. Mrs. Charles' open affront has hurt me cruelly! I loved her so, and would have told her everything had she received me kindly. I thought I could trust to her gentle, motherly love.

"But now, I would die before I would make any explanation! I have the Howard heart and the Howard pride!"

"Oh, Carolyn, dearest, don't be so bitter," Nina faltered.

"Mrs. Charles adores Julian, and, as a mother, she would take up the cudgels for him, against any one!

"The information came so direct, Philip says, that they were forced to believe.

"It was overwhelming in weight. You see Julian has thrown up the best case he ever had! It is ruin for him to leave here so. Philip said that he never saw any one suffer so acutely or weep so bitterly!" and again Nina burst into passionate sobs. "There may be worse news yet to come."

"Wept!" sneered the resentful Carolyn. "I hate men who weep! He should have first horse-whipped Kendricks and later demanded an explanation from me, or abducted me, or done something manly; but, come now, Nina, do you love me well enough to share my solitude and my bad temper for a few days?

"Has the whole world turned against me?" There was the shadow of tears in the proud orphan girl's voice.

"Oh, Cara mia, you know how I love you!" and then, Nina arose and impulsively threw herself into her friend's arms. The women's hearts yearned to each other in this hour of Julian's desertion.

When they were shut up in the great old coach and were dashing through the fragrant forest roads toward

the Manor, Carolyn then told Nina the whole circumstance of Kendricks' brutal overtures.

"If I don't make that brute sorry for the havoc he has wrought in my life! Just you wait and watch me now, Nina! I will also teach Mr. Julian Charles a lesson!" The tide of her anger was swelling high over her reason!

"Nina, never love or trust any man; they are not worth it!" cried that young oracle of wisdom, Miss Howard. "They are all either selfish, distrustful or wicked. Julian's faith! A broken reed!"

"Not all, Cara mia," began pretty Nina.

"Don't call me by that name; I can't bear it!" snapped Carolyn. "We will drop that forever now."

"I beg your pardon, dearest, I thought you always liked it. I am so sorry!" faltered the yielding Nina.

"I did like it once, darling, but not now. Oh! I am only a weak fool!" and she too burst into a flood of tears, which greatly relieved her over-wrought nerves. Her strength now was in her weakness.

Nina did not seek to quell this expected storm, but only drew the queenly head down to her breast and caressed the golden hair, gently. And so they sorrowed in a silence which drew their hearts together!

"'Fore Gowd, I is thankful to see you here, Miss Nina!" cried old Mammy, as she met them at the carriage step, "dat chile of mine is been lookin' like de los' sheep o' Israel all day. I couldn't do nutten to sacrify her, an' she mos' snap off ole marster's head for axin her what wus de matter! Now, may be, honey, you can make my chile happy, an' dat will make us all happy."

The warm-hearted old negress had divined the sorrow.

"I certainly will do my very best, Mammy," cried Nina, grasping the wrinkled black hand kindly. "And how are you, Mammy?"

The poor old slave glowed under the pretty girl's caresses.

"Oh, I'se jest toleble, tank Gowd, jest toleble. I had

de mis'ry in my back, but I put a stockin' o' hot salt to it las' nite, an' it's better now, tank our heabenly Father!"

She followed them, shuffling along, to Carolyn's cosy private apartments, where a roaring fire welcomed them.

Then Mammy bustled around and pulled up the easy chairs. She patted up the pillows on the bed, and turned down the coverings, and placed a dainty pair of red satin slippers, with a wrapper to match them, beside the fire. Her clucking around was at last finished.

"Now chilluns, ebery ting is comf'ble for de nite. Honey, bring Miss Nina down to supper when de bell rings! Aunt Judy's got hot waffles dat will melt in yo' mouf an' some broil' chicken dat won't wait."

In a little while the hospitable Judge sent up word, by Toby, that Mr. Augustus Kendricks had called.

Carolyn then indignantly slammed the door in her groom's face, saying tersely, "Just tell him, for me, to go home! I will not see him! The impudence of this scoundrel calling on me after his conduct last night!" she cried, turning to Nina. And little Nina trembled in fear.

Mr. Kendricks did not remain long in the drawing room, but in a secret chagrin made his way homeward, deeply cursing his ill luck. He received about half of the message.

Kendricks had a sly fashion of his own to go spying upon his slaves when they thought him conveniently absent, and so, to-night, putting up his horse himself he stealthily went down to the quarters.

The sounds of a joyous merry-making came stealing from one of the cabins; the rest were all dreaming peacefully enough in the white moonlight with the blue smoke lazily curling up from the chimneys.

It was from the house of Sam, a great colored beau, and a general favorite on the plantation, and also Mr. Kendricks' head stable boy, that the sounds of this unwonted merry-making issued.

Sam was also locally famous for his deft banjo picking, and the sounds of the melodious strings rose high above the jocund voices.

The cautious Kendricks crept along under the shadows of the roof until he at last reached the low window and furtively looked within.

The sable guests were all too intent upon a dancing match to suspect any intruder to be near at hand.

A rare bright picture of slavery days they made in the golden firelight!

Great fat pine knots blazed in the huge chimney, so that no other light was needed.

Three fine strong darkeys had undertaken a dancing bout and the one who could hold out longest would win a coveted prize. Several men patted the double rap, as Sam, the host, sat there proudly beside the fireplace, singing jolly snatches worked in between his artistically wild accompaniment.

They danced the "buzzard lope," "chicken in de bread tray," "ca-ro back," and other quaint dances peculiar to their race; then all the circle joined in singing as the heels flew faster:

"Run, nigger, run, de patter role 'll catch you,
Run, nigger, run, you'd better git erway;
Dat nigger run, dat nigger flew—
Dat nigger tore his shirt in two!
Run, nigger, run, de patter role 'll catch you,
Run, nigger, run, you'd better git erway!"

Little pickaninnies would dart out like frisking squirrels almost under the feet of the dancers, then cut a happy little pigeon wing, and retire into the shadows again weaving in and out, among the lights and shades. It was a merry hour.

A great pile of sweet potatoes lay roasting in the fireplace, and savory odors from two 'possums slowly baking as they hung from sticks leaning in the chimney

corners filled the whole room and quickened the paces of the dancers with a prophecy of the feast to come.

An aged black crone sat in one corner carding and "wrapping" the wool of a girl who sat at her feet, going one eye on the dance.

Despite the cheers and encouragement of the onlookers, the three champions presently fell on the floor breathless and panting, and yet hating to give up the fray.

Then Sam gayly shouted, "Come on, Granny, grease your shins, an' teach dese young niggers here how to Rang-tang!"

"Hey! Hey! Sam, you tink I'se a fool? I ain't gwinter dance at dis time ob life. Go on, chile!" And her pendulous lips rolled back in a laugh.

But the guests all took up the merry shout, "Come on, Granny, you ain't gwinter let dese young gals beat you!"

A few magic touches on the banjo, with Sam's double rap, was at last too much for Granny's dignity.

She tossed up her turbaned head, took a reef in her homespun skirt, and then began pacing around slowly in the fantastic Rang-tang dance.

"Go it, Granny!" "Go it, ole 'oman!" Your back bone ain't broke yet!" shouted the admiring crowd, as they sang in a monotone as the old African began to "throw herself!"

"Pick de banjo, sing de song,
Rang-tang, boys, de whole nite long—
Come on, niggers, can't you sing?
Buzzard lope, cut de pigeon wing,
Rang-tang? O, Rang-tang!
Dat's de song we niggers sang.

"'Possum grinnin' in de tree,
Hi, I ketch you soon, you see!
Roasted 'taters, 'possum meat,
Makes dis nigger's mouf so sweet!
Rang-tang? O, Rang-tang!
Dat's de song we niggers sang.

"Cotton white, out in de fiel',
Come on, niggers, shake your heel!
Pick de banjo, sing de song,
Rang-tang, boys, de whole nite long—
Rang-tang? O, Rang-tang!
Dat's de song we niggers sang."

The light-hearted fun of his slaves made the bitter spirit of the master rebellious. His moody eyes ravenously sought for one face amid the crowd. It was absent. She was not there!

So going to the door, he gave a thundering knock, and then the music suddenly stopped; the dark figures all sat like frozen statues with their uplifted hands yet in the act of applauding, and poor, old Granny stood still, there, holding her skirts aloft, and with her eyes bulging out with a sudden fear.

Sam opened the door. He was ashen pale as he murmured, "The Master! Yes, Massa."

"What is the meaning of all this damned noise?" growled Kendricks. He was in a bitter rage now.

"Master, we wus jest havin' a little fun, 'cause we cotch two 'possums las' nite. We ain't doin' no harm, Mars Gus," said Sam, humbly. The whole circle quaked in fear.

"Clear out to your cabins, all of you, and get to your beds! I don't run a lunatic asylum on this plantation. Where is Evelina Cherry?"

"She ain't been here, Mars Gus! I reckon her and Aunt Critty done gone to bed," answered Sam, as the darkeys slowly drifted through the back door, like leaves before the autumn wind. There was the muttering of a coming storm which they all knew but too well!

With an oath, Kendricks went to seek the girl who had always managed, so far, to escape him, even though she was his slave. And now, his eyes were bloodshot.

Sam had fallen desperately in love with the pretty new slave, and he had fondly nick-named her "Sweet Evelina,"

and he was in a constant secret distress, fearful of some harm befalling her; so now, as his master disappeared, the jealous Sam darted through the back door, and keeping hidden in the shadows of the cabins, ran along like a hare to warn the poor girl to flee.

Old Critty was spinning, beside her own fireside, and Evelina sat at her feet, carding soft rolls of fleecy cotton, and listening eagerly to tales of wonders her granny had to tell of her far off African home. Sam timidly opened the back door, and then, he cried in a loud whisper, "Run an' hide, Evelina! Mars Gus is lookin' for you! Quick. For God's sake, go!"

An expression of abject fear came over the faces of the two slaves listening within. The spinning wheel stopped with a drone, as old Critty sprang erect, with rolling eyes. "Oh, Lord! Save my chile!" she wailed. "Run, honey—gal, run out in de pine thicket an' hide. Go fur away as ye can!"

Evelina needed no second bidding, but darted away into the moaning pine forest that seemed to bewail her sad fate as the wind harps sighed low!

Old Critty returned to her wheel and then crooned an old hymn tune slowly.

Her door was violently thrown open and in strode the gloating Kendricks.

"Where is that sly hussy, Evelina?" he demanded, harshly.

"Marster, I ain't seen dat chile since supper time. May be she at de 'possum roastin', or settin' up wid some ob de sick uns."

His cruel eyes scanned every nook in the house. "You damned old witch I believe you have hidden her away!"

" 'Fore Gowd, I ain't, Marster. I do'no' where Evelina is!"

Kendricks glared fiercely for a moment at the old woman's inscrutable face, then he slammed the door and suddenly departed.

He suspected that the young girl had eluded him by hiding in the forest, and, at white heat with anger, he brought out his horse and went in pursuit of his victim. As he dashed along through an opening he suddenly saw a slender figure dart across the road, and then plunge into the thicker woods. He turned his horse and followed at a run.

In and out, among the pines, the hunted slave girl sped like a spirit, until at last, becoming completely exhausted, she sank in a quivering heap to the ground, and so was easily captured.

Kendricks sprang down from his horse, "You little devil, I have got you at last! How dare you try to escape my will? I'll fix you now. Did I not pay my good gold for you, you little devil! Are you not mine, body and soul? Can I not kill you if I so desire?"

He stooped over and grasped her thin shoulder and then pulled her up to her knees as he would have treated a truant child.

"Will you now learn to obey me? Will you now acknowledge me your master?" and he lifted his riding whip threateningly aloft. The timid fawn was in the wolf's jaws!

"Oh God! Oh God! save me!" shrieked the poor girl, screaming in terror.

"Yes! I am your slave, so kill me, Master, or I will kill myself, for your wicked hands shall not touch me while I am alive! My soul was not bought by your gold! It belongs to God and was not paid for! My body is yours, but only in death can you touch it!"

And then, a long, mournful shriek rang out through the forest as the whip descended sharply across her shoulders, once, twice, three times, in hard, cutting blows, as the infuriated man cried, "Take that, and that, and that! You black rebel, this will teach you whose will is law among my own slaves!" His arm was lifted high for another brutal blow, when a heavy stick was

brought crashing down upon his head, and it felled him like an ox. The tyrant lay senseless at the slave's feet!

A strong arm lifted the bleeding Evelina from the ground, and then her agonized eyes fell upon the face of Edwin Roper, Judge Howard's quadroon slave. His wild eyes shone like a demon's.

"Never tell who struck this blow for you, my child, for it would cost me my wretched life!" he whispered. "He," pointing to Kendricks' prostrate form, "is only stunned; fly to Miss Howard. Get away before he recovers! She is good and will hide you, and protect you. I—can do nothing more!"

The grateful girl grasped his hands and kissed them wildly as her salt tears fell in torrents over them. It was the benison of the unhappy slave.

"You have saved me! Oh, God! bless this man forever! You have saved me from a cruel death, and I will never forget it; do as you will with Evelina. I am your slave now!"

"Come girl! we must both be far beyond his reach when he comes to himself!" and the excited Roper half lifted, half dragged the tortured young creature through a nearby tangled forest path that soon brought them to the Manor.

"You see that light in the second story corner window? that is Miss Howard's room. Go now to her, and beg her to help you! She is an angel of mercy, and, she will protect you as no one else can!" and then Roper disappeared, leaving the fugitive slave trembling there alone.

She did not dare to arouse the Howard household, for she knew it was very late, so she climbed like a cat upon the veranda and then tapped at the window blinds and hid like a fugitive bird in the vines. There was a sudden movement within!

Carolyn and Nina were already robed in their night dresses and were sitting on the rug before the fire, with their feet curled up under them in a Turkish fashion.

Their long hair was unbound and they were brushing out the soft ripples into shining veils of silk, as they talked of their uttermost thoughts and feelings in the friendly glow lighting their sweet faces.

"What was that noise, Carolyn?" asked Nina, in a frightened whisper. They listened intently.

Again sounded that timid tapping on the blinds. "Who is there?" demanded the fearless Carolyn, as she thrust her rosy feet into her slippers and went toward the window and peered out.

"Let me in, Miss Howard, let a poor girl in, for the love of God!" a distressed voice answered, and then Carolyn unfastened the low window.

The poor, terrified slave maiden entered the room and fell at Carolyn's feet, saying piteously in anguished tones, "Oh, Miss Howard, save me! For God's sake save me!" She was truly a pitiable object. Her dress had been torn from her shoulders, and blood still flowed from the cruel wounds made by the heavy black snake whip of Kendricks.

"Why it is Evelina Cherry, Mr. Kendricks' new house girl!" cried the frightened Nina, springing up.

"Poor girl, to have such a brutal master," exclaimed Carolyn, looking down kindly upon the suppliant with tender eyes. "Why did you come to me, Evelina? What can I do, poor child?"

"I have heard so often of your goodness, Miss Howard, every one speaks of you, every one loves you; you are rich and powerful, and I know you could save me!"

"Come near to the fire, you poor creature. I will indeed protect you for this night!" and Carolyn, with strong, gentle hands then raised the exhausted girl to her feet and led her up to the rug, where she sank down in the glow, grateful and reassured.

"Now tell me everything, Evelina, you are safe here. Tell me the whole truth."

"I am only the child of a poor black slave, Miss How-

ard, whose master first broke her poor heart, and then parted her forever from her lover. His own blood also flows in my veins, but I hated him! My mother grieved until he sold her and poor old Granny and me to a kind old lady where we found God's peace and safety. But my poor, dear mother died; and, first, beside her death-bed, she made me swear to kill myself before I would ever share her awful fate! See? I kissed this cross and the handle of a knife that her own true sweetheart had made for her, the point had been dipped in Voudoo poison, and I have always carried it, hidden in my breast, since I took it from her cold, dead hand! That is my sworn oath!

"I have always been a good girl, and my kind mistress brought me up in the house and taught me to read and write. I was her own little maid and I always slept beside her bed; but she died suddenly, and then, we all had to be sold. She had always intended giving me and Granny our freedom at her death, but alas, had not made a will. We were both bought by a slave trader for an order of Mr. Kendricks. Oh, Miss Howard, he is not really a man, he is a cold hearted brute, a cruel beast! They say on the plantation that he seeks to wed you, but, Oh, lady! shun him as you would the smallpox. He is wicked and pitiless. See the cruel cuts he has given me this very night because I would not give myself up to him, body and soul! Oh, save me! you must save me!" and the poor girl clung to Carolyn's knees whilst the bitter tears rolled down her childish face.

"You shall be protected, poor girl, fear nothing! That fiendish man shall never lay his hands on you again! And this is the husband to whom my uncle would give me!" cried Carolyn with a burning indignation crimsoning her face. "Never! Never!" she cried.

The two patrician girls then bathed and dressed with cooling salves the wounded shoulders of the little slave,

and Carolyn made her rest upon the sofa beside her own fireplace, where, secure and peaceful, Evelina slept, worn out by utter exhaustion, until late the next morning.

When the senseless Kendricks at last came to himself he was chilled to the very marrow, and lying there alone in the cold wind-swept forest.

An owl sat in a tree near by and moaned and shrieked most dolefully to the wind's accompaniment.

The heavy blow that had felled Kendricks caused his wounded head to ache and throb intolerably.

He had not even the faintest idea whose avenging hand struck the blow, and knew, also, that he dared not publicly investigate the sudden attack; but, swearing a bitter vengeance on Evelina, he staggered at last to his feet, and painfully climbed upon his patient horse. He rode slowly homeward with curses on his lips.

All was deathly still at the slave quarters. He went back to old Critty's cabin, but the fire had burned out and the room was deserted, for she, too, had disappeared!

With an awful oath Kendricks called up Sam, who now appeared, half clad and lazily rubbing sleep from his eyes, to take the master's horse in charge There was no sign of intelligence in the negro's face.

Not much rest did the planter get that night; his guilty conscience pricked him and his throbbing head burned like fire. Even the brandy flood that he poured down his throat would not bring him the welcome sleep.

CHAPTER IX.

"THE WAGES OF SIN,"—PAID BY THE INNOCENT!

Next morning, as Carolyn Howard threw open all her windows to admit the golden sunlight and bring in the invigorating oxygen breathing in the crisp, autumn

air, she found old Critty crouching beside her blinds on the outside and hidden by the thick ivy vines that twined over the veranda.

The frightened and benumbed creature groveled at Carolyn's feet, whining. "I wants Evelina, my own, sweet Evelina. Oh, missus, for God's sake let me see my honey-gal!"

"Is this Evelina's grandmother? Why, you poor, old creature, come right in. I know that you surely are half frozen." And then Carolyn drew her into the warm room where she and her thankful grandchild were soon locked in each other's arms, weeping for joy. Giving them in charge of Mammy, with every injunction for their comfort and strictest safety, Carolyn sent them down to the kitchen, while she and Nina leisurely dressed for breakfast.

It did not take the graceful mistress of the house very long this day to slip on her crimson silk morning gown and twist up her bright hair into a coronet above her fair brow.

Then throwing one shapely arm around her friend Nina, they descended into the large, bright dining room.

The Judge already sat beside the fire reading a paper, and his old, copper toddy pitcher was smoking hot beside him.

A vision of beauty, Carolyn, swooped down upon him, crying:

"Uncle James, a boon, a boon I crave!" and she gave him a good-morning kiss, and then sat down upon the arm of his chair. He was already holding Nina's hands and beaming over his glasses upon the pretty pair in an excellent humor.

"A boon? What is it, Queen Esther, and what is thy request? It shall be granted even to the half of my kingdom!" and then he smiled most tenderly upon the child of his heart.

"Uncle, dearest, I have harbored two runaway slaves,

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think of it! They belong to Mr. Augustus Kendricks, and they fled last night from his brutal cruelty and the lash! The poor girl's shoulders are all lacerated and bruised!"

And tears quivered in Carolyn's sympathetic voice. "Now I require a young woman to help Mammy, whose eyes have grown so dim, and another weaver is needed down at the quarters. Evelina's grandmother has had great experience at the loom. I want you to buy both of them for me." And the wily Carolyn was toying with her Uncle's white rich hair in a most coaxing manner.

"Great heavens, Carolyn, do you not know that it is a grave offense by our laws to shelter and protect runaway negroes?" The old jurist was looking at her in amazement. It was an unheard of risk!

"That, for the offense and the law!" cried the imperious beauty, snapping her rosy fingers.

"Gus Kendricks is a cold-hearted brute to his slaves, and this delicate, picturesque young creature shall either be my own maid, or else back goes 'May Queen' to his stables! I am twenty-one, Uncle, and I can afford to indulge my whims, so please attend to it, Uncle James. You must buy this girl for me, and her old grandmother also. I will take no denial."

"Perhaps, though, Kendricks will not give up the young girl? What then?" asked the hesitating Judge. "We cannot compel him to sell a slave!"

"Well, he simply must, or else never enter my presence again!" and Carolyn bounded off the chair and paced the room like an angry goddess. "If he ever strikes that girl again, it will be across my own body!"

"By heavens, Carolyn, it is well for the public that you were not born a queen! The 'bloody Mary's' reign would be tame beside yours!" The old man was startled at her earnestness.

"Now, Uncle, you know that I am not bloodthirsty; but I will have justice. If any one in the entire country

needs the lash it is Gus Kendricks, not these helpless women!"

Edwin Roper now noiselessly entered, attired in the livery of the Howards, and bowed most respectfully to the group.

He said, "Master, there is a man from River Side Plantation sent here by Mr. Kendricks to ask if his two runaway female slaves have been seen here? What shall I tell him? They are out from River Side with a blood-hound searching the woods, and the dog has tracked them to Miss Howard's windows."

The agonized man cast down his eyes and yet his face was as expressionless as a marble mask.

He seldom lifted his eyes in the presence of his mistress.

"Say to the man," cried Carolyn springing up from the chair, "that Miss Howard has taken his master's two down-trodden slaves under her protection; and, that I will never give them up!

"He has lost all human rights to control them!"

"Carolyn, Carolyn! Now that will never do! There is no use to insult Mr. Kendricks," said the Judge austerely. "The rights are all on his side! You will lose all your chances to help them!"

"Then, Uncle, you must ride over at once and see him yourself, and you can repeat to him all that I have told you; for I will not give these slaves into his hands. I will take no denial. They shall be kept safe here, I have promised!"

"Damn it all, Carolyn, you can't queen it over everybody in the whole universe!" cried the excited old gentleman, jumping up and facing the mutinous girl.

"I can, in my own domain, Uncle, darling!" and the artful Carolyn kissed him tenderly and hung on his shoulders. And—the courtly old judge yielded to her prayers!

So the man returned willingly with the message that

Judge Howard would drive over and see Mr. Kendricks in regard to his slaves at noon. Thus, the whole subject was dismissed, while they leisurely discussed the bountiful breakfast.

There was a scene at River Side! The baffled Kendricks cursed and swore in his mad wrath at being publicly flouted before his slaves; but, he dared not refuse Carolyn's determined request after so seriously offending her on the unlucky evening in the forest.

So, when Judge Howard drove over to confer with him he graciously consented to the transfer of the two slaves, and made every sort of flimsy excuse for the abuse which he had inflicted upon them.

Evelina soon felt the faithful love and gratitude of a dog toward her beautiful mistress and made herself invaluable as a maid; but all the fiery, young blood in her body was filled with passionate adoration for her brave deliverer, the quadoon slave, Edwin Roper.

With every nerve of her heart and fiber of her soul, she loved him, and yet, he took no more notice of her than of the greyhound that lay at his mistress' feet.

The cruel revenge of mixed blood, at the hidden promptings of nature. At every opportunity she rendered him some little service; she even anticipated his every wish, and gazed longingly upon him with her wistful, yearning eyes. She would have been his groveling slave had he permitted it!

He could not but read her too apparent idolatry, and while kind to the girl whom he pitied, he let her clearly understand the utter hopelessness of her desires.

He grew more sadly morose and more deeply embittered as time went on; a look of intense sadness settled down on his face and he was at last almost unapproachable in his misery.

One night Evelina met him beneath the great water oaks in their back yard as she was going to her cabin, and

then, with downcast head and hands pressed to her heart, she stood before him quivering in every nerve.

"What can I do for you, Evelina?" he asked coldly. The trembling girl shivered in her mad passion.

"Only speak to me and don't seem afraid to come near me. Let me at least be your slave! I would die to make you one moment's happiness, for I worship the very ground you stand on!" It was the wild avowal of a simple heart, loving madly, and blind to all else.

"My poor girl!" cried the unhappy quadroon, Roper, taking her trembling hand kindly, "you are beside yourself. I can never love you! You must tear this wild passion from your childish heart. I will never marry any one. I am a human outcast, a man of no race! You must place your affections on some one else. Some one who has a life to live! You are a good girl, Evelina, and no doubt you will make some honest man a happy wife."

With a cry of pain the wounded creature flung herself down before Roper and clasped his knees. "I want no man's love but yours! Let me only be your dog, to touch your hands and hear your voice and do your bidding. You fought for the poor slave girl!"

"Poor girl! friendless, out-of-place, misbegotten soul! This is sheer madness. We are companions in misery! Go to your home! You can never be anything to me, child. We are of no color, no creed, no race!" he answered firmly, but with a great pity shining in his haunted looking eyes. He voiced the curse of an outraged nature!

He put her gently from him and left her kneeling there on the cold, frosted ground.

She presently arose and fled away to her cabin and flung herself wildly in her old grandmother's arms. "Oh Granny, Granny, don't you know any charm that can win a man's love? Can't you give me something? I am dying with this pain in my heart! I love Edwin Roper and yet he avoids me like a snake in his path. He will not

love or pity me. I am accursed. Help me! Help me!"

Old Critty fondled the love-crazed girl, and mumbled fondly over her in a strange, uncanny gibberish, whilst she stood tottering in the firelight like one of Macbeth's witches.

"Hush, honey gal, hush! Your ole Granny knows many things. The secrets of our ole gods. I will soon fix a charm for my lil-gal. Don't fret honey-bird! Dat man will sure be on his marrow-bones before you when de nex' moon is young! Jest wait and watch, my Evelina!" And then she added, "Get me some fresh laid eggs. I will make a love-puddin'. He shall taste your own blood! Hi! hi! Granny knows the Voudoo charms!"

She then broke into a bowl several eggs, mixed in some flour and spices and molasses, then stirred all thoroughly as if for a cake.

She then said huskily, "Honey-chil', I mus' have some ob your own warm, red blood! Are you afeared to cut yo' arm?"

"Afraid? No, Granny. I would cut off my right arm to win his love!" And the girl sprang eagerly forward to grasp the sharp knife which her witch grandmother held out to her, and baring her slender arm, quickly stuck it into her tender flesh near the shoulder. The warm, dark blood gushed freely out and she caught it in a cup until it was half full, and then her grandmother tightly bound up the flesh wound. She fondled and wept over the girl murmuring her mystic Voudoo charms!

The blood was soon stirred into the batter, thoroughly, and then it was all poured into a pan and well baked.

When done it was a savory and tempting looking cake, and no one could have guessed its uncanny contents.

Old Critty bore it in triumph over to Edwin's humble home, as a sample of her own culinary art. He politely accepted it, and to please the old woman joined her in eating a large slice of it.

She returned in triumph to her hut, laughing with

glee, and crying out, "Don't you fret no mo', honey-gal, dat white-nigger done taste yo' blood, an' he won't res' till you belongs to 'im.

"Dar ain't no gittin' around it, ef he lives, he will jess go crazy wid love fur you!"

So Evelina was comforted in her hopes and childishly happy for awhile. But the anxious days slowly passed and the Voudoo love charm did not seem to work! The love-sick girl constantly threw herself across the ill-fated Roper's path, only to be disregarded and wounded to the soul.

She knew not the horror with which he regarded the blood of shame. Not even fair Juliet was fonder of her Romeo than the grateful waif, sweet Evelina, was of her quadroon beloved. And her love seemed to him only a crime against nature's laws! Like a rich exotic denied the heat of the sun, the poor slave soon drooped and faded; her fevered eyes grew larger and wilder, and an elfish, half-starved expression, rested on her face. It was the beginning of a death in life. For there was no law for her stormy, ill-starred soul, no rest! One night she sought Carolyn's room, at last, in her growing despair.

She went to her young mistress after all the household was sleeping to pour into her sympathetic ear the burning story of her heart's sorrow.

Carolyn was awakened by a low moan, and a sudden fear clutched at her own heart, as she thought of all the numerous, fantastic ghost stories which she had heard in the happy childhood days. The house had its hidden skeletons.

She listened intently, hardly daring to breathe; bitter sobs followed, and the weird, white moonlight poured into the room, streaming in a pale sheen through an opened shutter of one window. Then Carolyn could not stand the suspense any longer, and so started up crying, "Who is that?" No answer came to her eager demand. "Speak, who are you?"

"Oh, mistress! my dear mistress! It is only your poor Evelina," sobbed a voice beside her.

"Evelina! You here, at this hour? What is the matter? Are you ill, my poor girl?" cried the heiress, and she sat up and took the chilled hand of the crouching girl and smoothed it gently.

"Oh, mistress, you are so good, and so wise; I am only a poor negro slave, and one who should never have been born! I want you to guide me, for I can't conquer this fearful love that is killing me! I have prayed to the good God and He will not even pity or hear me. I love your man, Edwin Roper, and he will not even turn to look at me; and yet I can't live without him! Oh, I am so wretched!"

"Why, Evelina, you poor, poor child. Why didn't you tell me all this sooner? I will speak to him or else to my uncle. I am sure that you would make Edwin an excellent wife, and an honest one. He should be proud to win your love.

"Be comforted Evelina, you shall yet be loved and happy; so be a good girl now and go back to your bed." And then Carolyn patted the child's drooping head. She was tender and sympathetic, for her own sad heart was moved.

The sorrowing girl felt hope renewed in her breast, and she then returned in peace to her slumber.

"Uncle James," said Carolyn next morning, when they were strolling together through the garden, where now only the ghosts of vanished roses and a few hardy chrysanthemums remained of all the summer glories, "Uncle James, do you not think that your lonely valet, Edwin Roper, would be far happier if he had a good and loving wife? He looks so discontented, and wretchedly miserable that his moody face really haunts me. Sometimes I even catch his hopeless eyes fixed on me, and they give me quite a shock. They are so full of a human despair. What a misplaced being he seems to be!"

"Why, bless my soul, Carolyn, I never have thought of such a thing. What man would not be happier possessing a rare jewel. A loving wife mates king or seer!"

"Now, Uncle, no light sophistries. I am talking hard, common sense," cried Carolyn sharply. "This is to right a natural wrong."

"So am I serious, my dear, and come to think of it, I believe that it would be the very best thing for Edwin; for he is too morbid and isolated; he is cut off from both those above and all below him.

"But who would be a suitable wife for him?"

"Do you not think that my little maid, Evelina Cherry, is a pretty neat girl? She is also quite refined, and is wildly in love with Edwin Roper, and I am of the opinion that she would make him a good wife. She is superior and she is a good girl."

"An excellent thought; like most of yours, my Carolyn. She would make an admirable wife for Edwin. He should be properly mated and no one could be easily found to suit him as well as your Evelina. She is as far above her humble race as he is, and is really a neat, smart little body. Why, I'll speak to Edwin about it at once. There is much reason in the plan."

So, while Carolyn, womanlike, planned the details of the wedding, the Judge called Roper into the library to soberly confer with him, and yet he hesitated. The old gentleman was a little nervous, as Edwin stood before him, dignified and unapproachable. He was always within the line of his duty.

"Edwin, have you ever yet thought of your marriage?" he began.

"Sir!" cried the startled slave quickly turning pale.

"No, Master, I have no wish to think of such a subject. Marriage is not for such as I. I am cut off from my kind!"

"Come, come Edwin, that is foolish! You are a fine young fellow, and you should have a wife and children

to make you a happy home. We live our lives, day by day, you know."

"And would you suggest a black wife for me, sir?" cried the man with darkening brow. It was outraged nature's open protest!

"No, no, of course not. One of your own color—now that pretty little Evelina Cherry, for instance. Miss Carolyn tells me that the poor girl loves you dearly and she wants you to make her happy; it is the wish of her girlish heart."

Edwin Roper reeled and pressed his hands to his burning brow, as he faltered out, "Miss Howard wishes that? Then tell her that I cannot! It is impossible! Impossible!" He almost choked over the last words.

"Why not, my boy? Evelina is a smart, tidy, little thing, and she is simply breaking her heart for love of you. If you will marry her, Edwin, I will give you a neat home, money enough to start life with, and give you both your freedom!" cried the Judge pompously, posing as a benefactor of the human race.

"My freedom! ha! ha! ha!" derisively laughed the tortured man. "Freedom, from what? From the daily misery that is eating my heart and soul away! Freedom from this taint of the accursed slave's blood! Freedom to live like a man, with brain, and talent, and ambition! No, you could not give me my freedom, Judge Howard, great though your wealth be, and noble as your heart is!" And the slave stood before his surprised master with blazing eyes and rigid form.

"Why man, man, what ails you? One would think I had insulted you, instead of offering you happiness. It is a poor return!" said the Judge sternly.

"Happiness! there is never any happiness in this world for such as I am. I am one accursed forever! Not created by God but born of sin and the devil! I am three-quarters white, yet I cannot go into the world as a man with rights, either social or legal." The justly indignant

man seemed to grow to the stature of a giant and take on new dignity.

"Do you think that I do not know that I am *your own son?* Your own flesh and blood in the sight of God! My poor mother, a fatally beautiful mulatto slave, once pleased your boyish fancy. It was the whim of an idle hour! To gratify your beastly passion, I was begotten, against the laws of God and nature, and brought into this weary world, at the expense of that mother's life, to forever bear the burden of your guilt and shame!

"I hate and curse my fatal black blood! But for that one dark stain, I would be any man's equal! I have brains, I have a heart and soul. I am your only child, and yet I am your slave. Your humble valet, daily used to brush your clothes, and to black your boots! Horrible! I would not dare call you father, or to eat at your table, and yet I am your son just as much as if I had been born of her, the stately lady of rank, who was your honored wife!" and then he waved his hand in an agonized trance at the superb painting of the dead lady of the manor, Lydia Howard, as once robed in her splendid wedding dress.

"You offer me my freedom! ha! ha! ha! Does your own conscience give you your freedom, my honored father! Too late! too late! Only God can release me!"

And Edwin Roper flung himself down into a chair and dropping his handsome head on the table, wept bitterly in a convulsion of anguish! He was human after all. The trembling Judge was ghastly pale and he looked a long ten years older as he solemnly approached Edwin and placed his hand on the slave's bowed head.

"Edwin! Before God you are my own son, and in my repentant heart I now call you that, and I tell you that I love you! Let me repair the fault of youth! It is a terrible crime and a life's mistake, committed in my wild days, when I was a hot-headed, fast youth! God knows that I have sorely repented of it, and I have secretly

grieved over it all of my later years. Would to Heaven that you, my poor boy, had been the legalized fruit of my married life. That one drop of black blood truly overshadows your innocent life. You know our iron code of state laws; you know all. I cannot acknowledge you, nor can you associate here with my race. You cannot take my property by will, therefore, take your freedom, my poor, wronged boy. It is only your right! I give you my last blessing, Edwin. Leave me to-morrow if you wish. That I can do for you. You shall have money enough for every comfort. Go away to the great North, and there, with your intellect, you can carve out a grand destiny. You can rise up and be a man among men!"

Edwin Roper lifted up his throbbing head and looked steadfastly with agonized eyes upon his legal owner and cried in tense, wailing tones, "Do you think that I can flee from my daily haunting thoughts? Will not the dark curse of shame follow me? What is money, or intellect to such as I? Ah, you shall know it all now, my father. I love with my entire heart, and soul, and brain, with every fiber of my body, your niece, Carolyn Howard! God bless her!" he softly added, under his breath, and he heaved a deep sigh, as though he had rid himself of a great burden.

"Great God!" was the awe-stricken whisper of the wretched father. "The curse of my early crime has indeed come upon me!" and the Judge fell upon the sofa in an agony of grief. This was nature's cruel revenge in kind!

The quadroon started up with a look of frenzied anguish on his hueless face. "Don't think for a moment that I have ever acknowledged this even to myself before, nor lisped it in words. Don't think that I would insult her, the angel, by one thought. It would be impiety! But, she alone is my idol. I swear it by my God! Now you know why life is impossible for me. I will take my freedom! I only pray now for death and oblivion.

Not even in a Heaven would I wish eternal life with this tainted blood boiling within me!" The slave threw his arms above his head in utter despair and then knelt beside the sofa and tenderly whispered in agonized tones, "Father, I am not poisoned, though the humble slave blood mixes with your own within my veins. Call me your son, only once, and then, bid me good-bye forever!" And he bowed himself down to kiss the trembling hands that hid his master's eyes.

"Edwin, my poor boy, my own son, God bless you now and forever!" and the grief-stricken man placed his hands on the bowed head of the innocent outcast. "My sin has indeed found me out! Forgive me, forgive me, my son!"

Their hearts thrilled once in the unison of natural love, the proud father and the slave-born son!

Edwin then slowly arose, and looked once more in a silent tenderness upon the abject, storm-shaken figure lying there on the sofa, and then with a bitter groan he fled away from the room and plunged into the deep shades of the park.

The love-crazed Evelina had been kneeling outside the door, a union of child and woman, and she had heard every sorrowing word that had been uttered.

As she cowered and crouched there Edwin Roper had flung the door open and fled away past her, his blinded eyes seeing nothing. His heart was overflowing with woe.

The quadroon girl followed him with swift, noiseless feet.

On through the park, on into the dense pine forest he went, then stopping, he flung himself on his knees, crying out in his anguish "God bless and protect her, and may God pardon me!"

There was a ringing shot, a hollow groan, and the strong man, cut off in his pride and youth lay there dead,

with the frenzied cry of the forsaken girl sounding in his ears, as he breathed his last.

She threw herself wildly down upon his body and kissed and madly caressed him. She prayed for him to open his eyes and call her name but once more.

A strange light came into her glittering eyes as she whispered, "He is dead!" and again she shrieked, "Edwin! Edwin!" all was still.

She folded his stiffening arms about her, in a childish fondness, and lay there upon his lifeless body.

She pressed her burning lips upon his cold ones, now but dead clay.

As he grew rigid in the chill of death she softly drew forth the poisoned dagger from her palpitating breast and she knelt long there gazing down upon his beloved face. She kissed his cold lips once more, and then with a cry of triumphant love she plunged the blade deep into her faithful heart and fell dead in his arms. The slave girl had found her freedom at last!

Their souls mounted together to the world supernal, where the curse of mixed blood is lost forever in the mantle of the Father's charity.

Side by side they lay, fearing nothing at last, while the night winds wailed through the lonely forest the dirge of the tortured ones who had no place in life!

Betrayed even before birth, the joint heirs of the sorrows of the one parent and the heartless crime of the other, they found the rest of Death, and entered into the company of the vast throng who have sought "The Farther Shore!"

The stars of Heaven shone kindly down on the dead witnesses of "man's inhumanity—burning insanity," and far away to the North, the breezes were bringing from the ice land afar, the faint rustling of that storm which was to convulse this glorious country.

CHAPTER X.

A SERENADE TO THE CONGRESSMAN-ELECT! AT CROSS PURPOSES! TWO NEW RIVALS!

There was a general consternation when the bodies of the unfortunate quadroons were found.

It was supposed to be a case of double suicide led on by love. The whole country rang with the news of the somber tragedy, for which no definite reason was ever known or rightly assigned. Many most romantic conjectures were formed by white and black, but as the dead quadroons were only slaves of humble degree, what mattered their sorrows! It was only the loss of valuable human flesh!

The supposed lovers were buried beneath the forest trees where they were found cold in death, and the sorrowful heart-secret of poor Edwin Roper was buried forever out of the reach of man.

The conscience stung Judge Howard was inconsolable, and he locked himself in his room for several days in silent agony, even refusing his favorite Carolyn admittance. His sin had found him out and crushed him!

It was well for him that he was diverted just after the sad tragedy by the exciting elections coming off, and he was almost unanimously chosen as a representative of his native state.

On the night of his election almost the entire voting population turned out, en masse, to offer good will and congratulations to their distinguished neighbor and to serenade the Judge.

Slaves bearing flambeaux preceded them; some of these had great balls of fire held high aloft, others held

transparencies of congratulations, and they were followed by the wagon bearing the merry musicians.

Naturally the victorious Judge had expected some public demonstrations and was prepared to greet his friends.

Baskets of champagne and good old Madeira, jugs of fine old Kentucky whisky, and opened boxes of cigars were waiting to be distributed.

The band, by olden rule, played "Hail to the Chief," and then with wild cheers and huzzas the crowd called for the Judge and demanded "A speech! a speech!"

They were all proud of the gifted local orator, "the old man eloquent," who had been rocked in the cradle of the proud old Southland.

Suddenly lights flashed out upon the upper piazza as a band of slaves appeared bearing torches, and, in their midst, was seen the stately old Judge, bowing a welcome to all of his supporters.

Then there was a sudden calm and all waited breathlessly for his coming words.

Had all the bees of Pliny rested on his graceful lips and left their honey there he could not have spoken with greater sweetness, eloquence and wisdom combined. Seasoning it all was a mental sauce of keen wit and hearty humor, making the happy people wild with enthusiasm. It was an ovation!

He spoke of the future possibilities of the grand old south, of her undeveloped wealth, her ripe culture, and he called up its brave sons and noble daughters.

He spoke in inspired words of their fervid dream of a southern confederacy and of an enlarged freedom and power in the political world that lay before the south in the near future.

And he believed the glittering dream soon to be realized!

The eloquent speech was at last over. Then the hospitable doors were thrown wide open and the thronging crowd were all invited within to partake of the good cheer

so liberally provided, while the band struck up the "Mocking Bird," that melody so dear to the heart of the brave children of Dixie!

A merry banter of wit, sophistries and toasts flew from mouth to mouth as fountains of golden champagne bubbled aloft to be caught in large glasses and quaffed by the loyal voters. The old "red rye" was opened to see the light for the first time in years. It fired their manly hearts!

Colonel Ashmore, deeply affected, blew his nose with a stately trumpet blast, until it was as red as a turkey's comb, and then, mounting a substantial hall chair he raised his glass of sparkling wine aloft, crying "Here's champagne to our real friends, and real pains to our sham friends, and may our throats be as long as the old Wateree when this golden, joy-giving wine flows down them!"

With a wild hurrah, the toast was drunk in chorus and the gallant old Colonel was assisted to dismount.

Then the fiery little Scotchman, Christy McCay, was tossed gayly upon a table by a host of wild young fellows and he was rapturously called upon for a toast. The iron gray hair seemed to stand out a bushier mane than ever before, and his sly eyes bulged out from their shaggy lashes like badly set jewels when he gazed around the crowd. To everyone's surprise he burst forth in a rich bass voice, singing:

"Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind—
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And the days o' Lang Syne?"

The old minstrel saw the general delight, and trolled out:

"And, surely you'll be your pint stoup,
And surely I'll be mine—
And we'll take a cup o' kindness yet,
For Auld Lang Syne."

He gazed around at his spellbound auditors, and burst into the chorus:

"For Auld Lang Syne, my dears,
For Auld Lang Syne,
We'll take a cup o' kindness yet,
For Auld Lang Syne!"

This hallowed chorus was taken up by thrice a hundred throats ringing out until the old roof-tree of the Howards echoed from rafters to floors, and it floated away in a grand sweep of melody into the forests beyond, these words from Bobby Burns' golden heart.

"We'll take a cup o' kindness yet,
For Auld Lang Syne!"

There were many happy tears gleaming in old friends' eyes as they quaffed a liberal toast to "Auld Lang Syne," and their political idol.

Then a burst of weird music came suddenly breaking upon the night air as the assembled slaves from Colonel Ashmore's, Dr. Blake's, Mr. McCay's and Judge Howard's plantations stood without, a band of bronzed, melody-loving brothers. They were playing their homely instruments: the fiddles, the accordeons, and the beloved banjos, all beating time on the bones, and some blowing on quills and bottles, and other quaint instruments of their own invention. This strange combination of sounds, making a melody of uncanny, witch-like music, that set the blood to writhing in one's veins like dancing serpents.

Then they all took their own masters on their shoulders and bore them in triumph around the illuminated grounds, with fantastic steps and dances.

They were also invited into the huge old kitchen for their own merry-making.

By the common consent old York was made the leader of the feast, and he gravely presided with as much eclat

as Marse Henry himself could have done. He was king of the high life below stairs.

He stood upon a barrel gesticulating and bowing until a general quiet was enforced, and then he cleared his husky throat and settled himself deeper in his coat as he said:

"Bred'ren an' frien's, it does me proud to speak to youns on dis ospicus occashun, when his honor, Jedge Howard, is 'lected to go to Congress." An emphatic nod of the head accompanied every word.

"Dare is gem'mens an' gem'mens, but de Lord neber made but four perfeck gem'mens in my humble opinun, an' bred'ren you all knows dare names. (A roar of approval.) Marse Henry Ashmore, he sets on de top rail, an' Marse Dan'el Blake, Marse Jedge, an' Marse McCay, day sets on de berry next to de top. Ob course, Marse Henry didn't care to run fur Congress, 'cause he wouldn' go agin' his frien', Marse Jedge! But, bein' as how we all is de slabes of de quality buckra, it do behoove we 'uns to meet tegedder, an' drink dare healt an' happiness.

"Fill up yo' glasses, fill um up all. Here's to de long life ob de afo'said gem'mens, an' may day be 'lected to jinė de heabenly host at las'!"

"Amen! Amen!" shouted many deep voices in a heartfelt chorus.

"Dat's rite, dat's rite, my brudders; fill 'em up agin!"

They shouted lustily and drank long and deeply.

It was indeed a community of tipsy, but heart-elated men, who wended their winding ways homeward at three o'clock in the cool of the morning hours, shouting and singing, and giving "three cheers and a tiger for Congressman Howard!"

The feast had filled the heart of black and white with universal joy.

The old Judge, covered with these honors, stood in the deserted doorway and gazed bitterly up at the cold, white stars, swinging above him, drifting away to hide beyond

the dark, silent forest, and he sadly repeated in an impressive whisper:

> "The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power—
> All that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave—
> Await alike the inevitable hour,
> The paths of glory lead but to the grave!"

And then a long sigh quivered up from his heart as sad memories swept over him. Memories of past sins and past joys!

The tall, graceful form of his niece, Carolyn, glided silently down the grand staircase; she wore a loose white evening wrapper and her silken hair hung in a glory around her.

With her tender eyes fixed upon him, she stole up behind her lonely uncle and lifted her two soft arms to encircle his neck, as she fondly said: "Uncle, dearest, you must not be sad to-night. Put aside every care for once, and leave behind all thoughts and regrets of the dead past. You have a glorious career now opening before you. Soon the shadows of night will be driven away by the heralds of the dawn, and so must your realized ambitions drive out the shadows that now darken your soul. For your national career begins now."

"Dear little comforter! What would I do without my Caro?" earnestly cried the Judge, as he turned to lovingly clasp her to his breast.

"I will have to go up to Washington in a few days; would you like to go with me, little girl, and enjoy a few weeks of city life?"

"Indeed I would enjoy it, Uncle James. I am so tired of the loneliness of the dreaming country, and I sigh to become a regular society lady for awhile," answered Carolyn, brightly, trying to chase away his gloom.

"Well, get all your pretty finery ready, then, and you shall have your bout of pleasure, my own, dear child.

No one must outshine Miss Howard at the capital; for you are in the time of life's roses!"

A week later, as Julian Charles emerged from the leading club house of Washington, leaning heavily on the arm of a new made friend, he thought his new, reckless life over.

In the bout of sin's pleasures, he had parted with too many of his hard-earned dollars.

He started back as he saw driving past him the Congressman-elect, Judge Howard, and Miss Carolyn, in company with Senator and Mrs. Graham. It was a stately family party.

Carolyn looked regal in her sable furs, and a large, plumed Rubens hat framed her lovely face. She merely nodded carelessly to Julian, who stopped and stared with open-eyed surprise.

It recalled and sobered him.

"Ye gods! what a Hebe of beauty and rosy health! Who is she, Charles?" cried his admiring friend, looking eagerly after the carriage.

"An old playmate and a friend of mine from home," stammered Julian. He felt the earth reeling under his feet. "Miss Carolyn Howard, niece of our new Congressman; one of Carolina's proudest belles."

"Lucky dog, you, Julian, to be her friend! Do these goddesses grow very thickly, down south? She is a radiant beauty!" excitedly cried the enthusiastic northerner.

"I believe that our southern women are considered very beautiful, Gordon. They are certainly cultured and well-bred. Their soft charms are peculiar to our land."

"I knew that you boasted of the finest horses and best whisky, and now I can swear to the women, if there are many of them like Miss Howard. You must introduce me, Julian. I declare that even my veteran heart is in a flutter!" and so, alas, was poor Julian's, a flutter of repentant shame.

He was looking ghastly pale and thin as Carolyn had

noticed in one fleeting glance. Her heart smote her, and then, she gazed wistfully back.

Julian Charles had been on the eve of finally wrecking himself after the blow of his sudden sorrow, and the keen life of disappointment. He had been "going it" at a rapid downward pace since reaching the gay capital; but the first sight of the woman he loved made him realize the dangers of his besetting weakness, and her presence renewed his failing ambition and endangered manhood.

Then came the thought of his noble and devoted mother, who even then was at home grieving over her boy. Her tender face now haunted him! His manly heart told him that there was but one safety, in a flight from the Circè cup of poisoned pleasures, and so, the next day found him on the southern train homeward bound.

He could not meet Carolyn in society as of old, or properly introduce her to his new made friends. There was the estrangement, the shadow of Kendricks, and—his own disgrace. So he wisely returned to facè his neglected duties.

There is a crisis in every life that comes either to make or mar it; and the sweeping flood-tide did not bear Julian Charles on to wreck and ruin, but toward success and fortune.

He threw himself into his abandoned work with a feverish energy; he left nothing unturned, and would allow no obstacle to come between him and his duty. He sternly locked his hopeless love and sorrow away in his heart and determined to carve out for himself a glorious destiny. And with a noble will, earnest perseverance, and endless faith, man can accomplish anything beneath the sun.

No sooner had the triumphant Mr. Kendricks heard of Miss Carolyn's social debut in glittering Washington, than he at once shipped on a pair of his finest blooded horses and, with his own valet, followed her thither. With

money, fine appearance and his matchless horses he knew he could easily make a splurge as a planter of note at the capital.

The very first night when he reached there he left his card at the hotel where the Howards were domiciled; and he learned that they had just gone out to Ford's theater to see the romantic Wilkes Booth essay Hamlet.

He went there at once in social pursuit.

Mrs. Senator Graham had taken Carolyn Howard in her own august hands, socially, and, in a short time, the beautiful South Carolinian had become the toast of every club in the city and a duly crowned belle and acknowledged beauty.

Their party this night occupied a box to the right of the stage and Mr. Cleve Gordon was Carolyn's proud escort. She moved a beauty and looked—a queen!

Gordon was the only son of one of the few northern millionaires of these ante-bellum days. He was a social lion and voted a gentleman of elegant leisure. He had fallen madly in love with Carolyn Howard from the very first glimpse of the rising star.

Kendricks, faultlessly attired, soon entered their box.

The Judge, proud of the young Carolinian, greeted him most cordially, and warmly introduced him to his friends. The astonished Carolyn was forced to greet him with politeness, but she did so in a cold, regal manner. Never had she looked as altogether desirable to Kendricks as at that moment. She queened it even among a nation's gathered loveliness. She wore a Nile green satin with braided pearls, and folds of priceless old lace wreathed around her perfect shoulders. A daughter of the gods indeed!

"Any news at home, Kendricks?" asked the Judge, presently, mindful of his constituents.

"Nothing of interest, sir. I suppose that you saw Julian Charles ere he left the city?" The Judge coughed in confusion.

"We only saw him a moment on the street. By the way, Mr. Gordon, he was walking with you, and he didn't look at all well. Was he ill?"

"No—not exactly ill—he had been dissipating a little too much, I guess, and I know that he had spent a day and night over a heavy game of cards. Are all southern men such insatiable gamblers as Charles?" he asked, laughing with a hidden cunning.

"No, not all! Most of us, however, are not averse to a little friendly game of draw; but, Charles has inherited this fatal love of cards from his poor father. He was an out and outer! I fear that Julian will never amount to much; it is a pity, too, for he is a brave man, of marked ability, and, he has a grand woman for a mother," said the Judge, sadly, as he thought of the noble Mrs. Charles.

Carolyn listened with a bitterly sorrowing heart. "And so, Julian not only has led a fast and reckless life here, but he hastily left the city as soon as he saw me. Well, I certainly will bother my head no more about him! He has thrown away a pearl richer than all his tribe."

The easy-going Gordon was soon on extremely friendly terms with the high-spirited Kendricks.

He at once gave him a visitor's card to his own pet club, and joyfully made an appointment to drive over the city with him next day.

They were at once on the road to an easy intimacy.

Mrs. Graham also graciously invited both of the gentlemen to dine with them next evening.

Kendricks felt that his "lines had fallen in pleasant places," and the field was clear—at last! Then all social plotting was forgotten as the great curtain rolled up, and the graceful young Booth, personating the subtle and saddened Prince of Denmark, appeared on the scene.

The vast audience hung on the magnetic voice and presence of the man, who was soon to enact one of the greatest tragedies in real life which the modern world had ever known. In these halcyon days, Wilkes promised in

time to rival the great Edwin Booth. It was with a feeling of sadness, almost akin to pain, that Carolyn was recalled to her surroundings of the hour, as the curtain dropped on the last tragic act.

Judge Howard hospitably insisted that they should all join him in a little midnight supper, and he with Senator Graham led the homeward way, followed by the stately Mrs. Graham, escorted by the elated Kendricks, and Gordon proudly followed in their wake, with the season's belle clinging to his arm.

As he sat beside Carolyn in the elegant, private dining-room of the famous old hotel where they were domiciled, the magnetism of her splendid health and physique wove a spell of hopeless enchantment around young Gordon's heart.

He was in the susceptible days when these embodied charms were irresistible.

No greater boon could he crave than to be the beloved of that peerless creature for life!

Kendricks was not so blinded by egotism that he could not read this burning admiration so openly shining in Cleve Gordon's deep blue eyes; and fearful of the rich man's rivalry, he grew wildly jealous. His stormy nature was alarmed.

Carolyn was the one ardent dream of his life; his one hope, his idol among women.

Had all the women in the world been moulded into one perfect creation, possessing all the graces of Psyche, the statuesque beauty of Juno, the wisdom of Minerva, and the winning love charms of the silver-breasted Venus, he could not have thought her more perfect than his heart's crowned, matchless Carolyn Howard!

A few nights later as he and Gordon sat lingering over the remnants of a club supper, smoking their cigars, and with half-filled wine glasses still beside them, Gordon asked, "Kendricks have you known Miss Howard very long?"

"Yes, ever since she was a little budding creature of ten years. You would not imagine to look at her now that she was ever a delicate, slender child, called 'the fairy of Sunset Manor,' would you?" And Kendricks smiled dreamily.

"Well, hardly! I can only think of her as a peerless Idalia!" cried the enthusiastic Gordon, with kindling eyes. "She must have many admirers? For, you southerners are gallant lovers and delicately minded chivalrists!"

Gordon was putting out some subtle feelers.

"Indeed, she has the pick of the whole state to choose from! Any man would be proud to enthrone Carolyn Howard in his heart and home!" and Kendricks' face grew seriously earnest, as Gordon started in secret alarm, and asked anxiously, as he knocked the ashes from his cigar with a trembling finger, "Has any one as yet the inside track?"

"Well, I will tell you in the strictest confidence, old boy, your humble servant is a little ahead in the race. Behold the final winner," he proudly cried, and smiled to see Gordon's startled face, and the weed drop from his fingers.

"By heavens, Kendricks, you are a lucky man, if this be true; is anything positively arranged yet?"

"Well, we are not formally engaged; but Miss Howard knows of my intentions, and the noble old Judge favors my suit—he has, in fact, given me his consent and blessing. I am his favorite of all the county men. So you see, my chances are good."

Gordon picked up his glass and tossed down the wine, and then cried, "All is fair in love and war, so I warn you, Kendricks, you have a rival in me. I will also enter the race for this golden prize!"

And the two men flushed and looked deeply into each other's eyes.

"By George! This is a surprise," at last exclaimed

Kendricks, "though, of course, it should not be to me; for any man, thrown beside Miss Howard, could not but love her.

"I can't prevent you paying her your honorable court, but I will make the fight of my life to outstrip you and win the prize!

"However, don't let it make bad blood between us. You are my friend, and I have known and loved her from childhood!"

They arose and shook hands warmly; for all that a bitter hatred sprang up between them, and they parted coldly at the first corner. For the smile that blessed one lover's heart has always broken many more!

CHAPTER XI.

RIVAL LOVERS! "I WILL BE YOUR WIFE!" THE ASHES OF LIFE.

Miss Carolyn Howard sat alone in her private parlor, lounging in picturesque abandon, in a pale blue velvet chair, truly looking a realized dream of beauty.

The slender jeweled hands were folded lazily before her. She was looking out upon the feathery snow flakes that were beginning to fall in soft flecks over the jostling crowd that mingled their joys and woes, pouring along through the broad streets of our national capital.

She was yearning for far off southern, cloudless skies.

It was all very fine to be hailed as a society queen, but she was now thinking of her own sunny home, and ardently longing to be there.

There were trembling heartstrings drawing her back to the happy past in "green old Camden town!"

So, when Augustus Kendricks sent up his card she welcomed him with a degree of cordiality.

He was of that vanished Carolinian paradise.

"It looks as if the bleak days of winter had arrived at last, Miss Howard," he said, greeting her and then dropping into a chair beside the glowing coal fire.

He was studying her charming face with a wildly beating heart now.

"Yes, winter has come in, and I was just thinking of the 'Sunny South,' and I am longing to join the birds in their annual migration. I guess they are still having those splendid 'Indian summer' days at home." Her eyes had a dreamy look in them.

"No doubt. Dr. Dan writes me that the birds are even more plentiful than usual, and he warmly urges my return," answered Kendricks. His eyes were keenly fixed upon the stately beauty.

"Then why don't you go home? How can you resist the prospect of a fine hunting season? For you are a sportsman, par excellence!"

He gazed earnestly in her face as if to read its secrets.

"You know what is keeping me lingering here, Carolyn! When you left you seemed to take all the sunshine away with you, and I have sought to find it here!" answered Kendricks, looking gloatingly upon Carolyn, who only lifted her eyebrows.

Here was the olden struggle again. Her fatal charms were his lure.

"I think that Uncle James will persuade Mr. Gordon to go down home with us for the shooting, and remain with us until the New Year," she said, evasively.

"Indeed! no doubt he will gladly accept, and we can perhaps teach him a thing or two in our country, smart as he is!" laughed Kendricks.

"It is indeed hard to take Uncle James away; he is submerged in the most heated politics. I feared he and several other excitable gentlemen would really come to fisticuffs in the hotel parlor last evening. They are all filled with the excitement of the hour. The subjects of

slavery and secession were being noisily argued. He blustered and thundered out his usual opinions until he was at last red in the face and his swollen veins stood out in knots. I had to enter the breach and drag Uncle away to hear Madame Anna Bishop."

"Well, you have at least had four weeks of the gay social life of Washington, Miss Carolyn; does it make you hunger for more? Are you wedded to 'Vanity Fair'? or do you long to return to pastoral pursuits and pleasures? Does your heart turn back to Dixie?" And Kendricks eagerly awaited her quick reply.

"I certainly prefer the Southland. I am homesick for my own dogs and horses, to see my own trusted and tried friends around me again, and to lead my free and happy country life!" exclaimed Carolyn passionately. "No; 'My heart turns back to Dixie and I'se gwine home!' "

"Ah, then! You are eminently fitted to be a country squire's chatelaine, to bear the keys of his heart and castle, and queen it in your own domain," the would-be lover smilingly said, leaning nearer to her.

"And," continued Carolyn, sharply, "sew on his buttons, brew his toddy, and be regarded next to his horses and fox-hounds. No, I thank you! My dreams, girlish though they are, soar higher!"

"Carolyn!" he pleadingly said, "let me speak now, I implore you! You know I have madly loved you for long years. Once, in the olden days, I saw you riding over the farm with Judge Howard; you were rather a thin and long-legged child then," he smiled, "but even at that time, you had eyes of fire, and a sturdy temper, likewise, I guess; for a dog followed you as you rode through a pasture and it chased the sheep. You called him back and springing from your horse stamped your foot at the offender with rage. The dog, in play, had handled a lamb too roughly, you rushed upon the scene, collared old Top with one tiny hand and then laid on the lash most unmercifully. I said in my heart that is my own

little sweetheart, she will make a grand woman some day. She has the courage and spirit of high blood!"

"I remember it well," said Carolyn. "You looked to me so big and strong, and you laughed at my futile efforts to master my poor old Top. So I was even more unmerciful to him in my anger, wishing that you were in his place; for you sneered at me!" Her eyes were sparkling ominously now.

"You were always unjust to me, Carolyn, and you have ever tried to see the worst side of my nature; why is it? I am fairly personable to look at, I am told—others say so!" and the planter plumed himself a bit.

"Indeed, how modest you are," gayly laughed Carolyn. She felt that she held the reins, so far!

"I know that I am rich. I have broad acres and many slaves, Carolyn; come and share them all with me; give me the right to love you, as I long to do. Be my wife!" and with pale face and vibrating passion born tones, Augustus Kendricks sank upon his knees before Carolyn Howard and clasped her passive hands in his trembling palms. And then the woman found her voice easily, as she said, coldly, "Mr. Kendricks, how many times will you subject me to the unpleasant necessity of refusing your flattering offer? You know that I do not love you. I do not even admire you in the ordinary sense of the word, and I can never forgive the unwarranted insult you once offered me in my lonely hour, when you dared to sully my lips by your enforced kisses!" She withdrew her hands angrily, for the tide of memory rose in waves of passion around her.

"I can never, never love you. Know once for all that there is no hope of your ever being in any nearer relation to me than you are now."

"Carolyn, you are cruel!" hoarsely cried Kendricks, and he arose trembling and weak with overmastering passion and leaned against the mantle looking down upon her proud, defiant face. "It is then as I feared.

You love Julian Charles! Yet, he has dared to play fast and loose with you, and he has quickly transferred his attentions to Miss Hastings. He is a born gambler and a reckless spendthrift! While here recently he led a fast degrading life, and he was the talk of the clubs. And you could love such a man as that! Madam!" he cried, "You stoop to conquer!"

She sprang up and faced him with flashing eyes.

"What Mr. Charles does and does not do, is of no importance to me; he, at least, is not a brute to his helpless slaves, and a vile destroyer of womanly innocence!

"This conversation has lasted too long. Good evening, Mr. Kendricks!"

And then gathering up her train she would have fled from the room but the excited man sprang forward and roughly grasped her arm. "Carolyn Howard, you shall regret this, mark my word. Julian Charles shall never be more to you than I am now. God hears my oath!"

"Threats! Ah, how brave and noble, how manly; now, you show your true colors!" sneered Carolyn, and she laughed tauntingly into his frenzied face. She then twisted her wounded arm from his vice-like grasp, leaving purple finger-prints traced around it, and with head regally erect swept from the room. For, it was good blood against blind fury!

Blinded with anger and raging in passion, Kendricks caught up his hat and fled away from the haunting perfume of her favorite violets, and far out of the echoes of her taunting laughter. He had played and lost the game of his life.

Next day all the men about town were astonished to see the rich southern sport driving his blooded horses through the principal streets of the city seated in state beside a famous soubrette, one of the dainty ballet girls whom the fast men delighted to honor behind the scenes, but would not even dare acknowledge as a bowing ac-

quaintance on the street. For these vicious beauties were only priestesses of the night.

Beautiful detrimentals!

Kendricks had been finally brought to the knowledge of the utter hopelessness of his ever gaining the one woman he desired for a wife, and so he plunged openly into the wildest dissipations. And, casting all restraint off, he showed the way to the growing debauchees in a rattling style of his own! A few nights later, Miss Carolyn Howard with Cleve Gordon as an honorary escort, accompanied by Judge Howard and Senator and Mrs. Graham, attended a special reception at the Presidential Mansion, where the queenly Harriet Lane then presided with such dignity and grace.

It was a scene of stately ceremony.

A great mutual admiration had sprung up between the young southern beauty, Carolyn Howard, and the exquisite lady of the White House. The grand, old President, James Buchanan, felt a tide of golden memories flooding his wearied soul, when he first looked into Carolyn's fathomless brown eyes. Time reversed his hourglass, and the statesman stood in his flower of youth, beside his beloved betrothed once again, when love's young dream held them both enthralled.

Strange fate that the untimely loss of that sweet dream became the stepping stone by which he had mounted to the Presidential chair.

And no woman shared his barren honors, for he still loved the vanished soul!

As Carolyn, in her robe of golden brocaded silk, swept through the vast apartments leaning on the arm of the accomplished young Gordon, many were the glances of admiration which followed her; for she was the evening star.

Her womanly vanity was highly gratified, for she had felt wounded in her self-esteem by the unexplained conduct of both Mrs. Charles and Julian.

They had acted with an unbecoming harshness not worthy of their caste.

Carolyn was a proud, imperious creature, and she had determined to hide her grief at any cost.

For she had tried her wings, and she knew how easily they bore her aloft. Her pride was aroused.

Cleve Gordon was radiant with happiness, as he guided the tall, queenly woman through the crowded chambers, stopping every few moments to chat with the distinguished guests. And all men envied him, while scores of women envied the belle.

"Isn't she beautiful?" sighed one disheartened city belle to another. "They say that she lives in a grand old southern mansion with as many slaves to do her bidding as an eastern sultana! Any one can see that Cleve Gordon is desperately in love with her, and he is so wealthy, too! What a noble match!" and then both sighed for the unattainable. Here seemed to be youth and beauty, birth and wealth, all the goods of the modern gods.

When Carolyn reached the hotel at a late hour she ushered her devoted escort into the boudoir for a brief farewell, whilst the Judge and Senator Graham remained in the lobby to smoke and chat with their friends of national repute.

The victorious belle was exultant and joyous, intoxicated with social success, and the conscious knowledge of her vigorous youth and beauty.

She dropped her long velvet cloak and her fur wraps to the floor, and then sank back into her favorite blue damask chair—a great "Sleepy Hollow" affair, drawn up before the fire.

She still held her bouquet of roses clasped in her slender hands, though they were drooping now and slowly dying. Her tawny gold hair was rumpled into little curls all over her head and her eyes held slumberous fires.

It swept away all Gordon's reserve, this realized dream of loveliness.

"Carolyn, do you know how exceedingly beautiful you are?" asked Gordon, intensely regarding her.

She flashed a bright glance at him. She ruled only a woman's kingdom with a woman's soft arts.

"Well, I have a mirror, Mr. Gordon," she laughed, "I know that I am not exactly a Narcissus, but I am not displeased with the image I see there. I am, sometimes, even a bit friendly with 'the reflections' it casts on me!"

He drew nearer to her, and then clasped one of her hands in both of his. He was out far beyond the breakers now.

"You could not help seeing your own glorious beauty in that mirror, Carolyn, and no more can you help reading the great love which I bear for you in my faithful eyes.

"Carolyn, I love you! With all my heart and soul, I love you! Bless my life, Carolyn, be my very own!" he passionately cried.

The loving words, spoken so reverently, falling so softly, so tenderly upon her, now, stirred her very soul, as the south wind stirs a bed of daffodils. The long lashes veiled her eyes, her breast rose and fell, and the birds in her heart sang for very joy.

He was manly, young and handsome. He was rich, a traveled gentleman, a scholar, a man of social rank.

Julian Charles should see at last that her heart was not breaking for him and her future position, as Gordon's wife, would be a proud one. And the southern girl's pride led on her wounded heart to a quick conclusion. This would right all things!

"Carolyn, will you answer me?" came the whisper nearer to her. He was a chivalric and an impassioned lover. He had caught the golden moment too.

"Yes, Mr. Gordon, I will be your wife," she whispered nervously, and then, lifting her eyelids she gave him a

half-frightened glance. She was startled at the sound of her own whisper. It was the woman's life sentence!

"Darling! Darling, God bless you! You shall never regret trusting your life and happiness into my hands." He caught her in his eager arms, and then kissed her, passionately, on the lips. She turned them quickly away, so that his lips rested on her cheek, and suddenly she seemed to stiffen and grow ice. His first kiss of love made her think of that other polluting, stolen one, and she knew when Gordon's lips touched hers that she did not love him, and that for a barren pride's sake alone, she had bartered happiness forever. For Love, sooner or later, is its own avenger. And, this Love had panther feet!

Her radiant lover was all tenderness and chivalry, and when the Judge entered the room later, he boldly asked for his consent to their union, and for his blessing.

The old Southron was startled but pleased as he reflected, "God bless me! This man is one in a thousand!"

"Caro, little girl, do you love Mr. Gordon?" he asked, tremulously, as he folded her to his breast. For he would have no life mistake now. The dead past rose up to warn him.

"I trust Mr. Gordon implicitly, Uncle James, and I have consented to share his life," she answered, gazing up from his shoulder with dewy eyes.

"It is a great surprise to me, my own little girl, but not an unpleasant one. Cleveland Gordon, I freely consent to your marriage with my niece, Carolyn, and I pray that God will bless you both. And, as you cherish her, so, may God deal with you!" his noble face shone with solemn joy.

He unclasped the soft, white hands from his neck and then placed them in her gallant lover's, and then left the room wiping tears from his kind old eyes. Carolyn's bark of life was in safe hands at last.

Cleve Gordon presently bade his affianced a loving

good-night, or rather good-morning, and he left her alone, with strange feelings surging in her heart, whilst he went on his way rejoicing that the glorious sun had arisen in his life at last.

Carolyn stood in the center of her lonely room and looked around her in a dazed manner, and then she shuddered as her glance fell upon the faded roses of her bouquet, now scattered on the hearth rug.

The clock ticked on in hollow notes as she gazed upon the drifted rose leaves there. "Ah! you were so fragrant and beautiful but a few short hours ago, now you are as dead and joyless as my plighted life will henceforth be.

"Good-bye, Julian!" she whispered, through her tears. It was love's last offering, these diamonds of the heart.

"Honey, ain't you gwinter come to bed ter-nite? Hits mos' sun up, an' I knows ole Boston Charlie, an' Cap'n Jack is crowin' fur day-lite at home rite now," said Mammy, entering from Carolyn's bed chamber.

The plighted bride seemed to awake in another world, for the past came sweeping back again.

"Why, Mammy, dear, are you waiting up for me? Do go right to bed, you poor old soul," and then Carolyn smiled brightly, into the old, black, kindly face.

"Now, honey-chile, you knows dat I ain't gwinter bed, while my lam' is away. No, tank Gord, I tries to do my duty!"

"Poor old Mammy, you do, indeed; but I fear that you will have a hard time keeping up with this bad lamb. Come, go to bed; good-night! I will undress myself, and don't get up in the morning until I ring my bell. Good-night, Mammy dear!"

And long she sat there, the belle of the White House reception, gazing into the glowing coals and not daring to ask herself the question: "Do I love him at all? Have I a heart to give this man, to whom I have given my life?" Her drooping lashes veiled her dreaming eyes!

Suddenly she started. "To-morrow, yes, to-morrow, he will come again! And, I owe him, Cleve Gordon, what I can never secure for myself! I owe him—the ignorance of the past, the knowledge of the dreams that faded away, in a gray cloud!"

She rose and opened her little writing desk, and drew forth a picture. "Julian! Julian!" she sobbed. "You threw away a heart that loved you! You heard the first slanderer's voice, and, you have thrown our life's happiness away!"

She kissed the pictured face once, then tore the photograph into little bits, and watched the fire consume them, one by one!

With a strange impulse, she gathered the rose leaves under her feet, and cast them, also, into the glowing coals.

"Life, and life's roses!" she sighed; "good-bye, and God bless you, Julian!

"Now, I can do my duty! I can meet Cleve Gordon with honest eyes." And, she awoke in the morning to find soft ashes of Life drifted over the once glowing embers of a heart kindled in Love.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SECRET UNVEILED.—AN APPARITION!

A few days later "Sunset Manor" was turned topsy-turvy to prepare for the Christmas holidays, that meant so much in the good old days in the "Sunny South," where bright eyes welcomed the mistletoe, in the hospitable days when all hearts warmed.

Judge Howard and Carolyn had arrived from Washington, and Mr. Gordon was soon to be their guest, arriving on Christmas eve. The luxuriant ivy vines, that had

clung to the side of the old house for two centuries, were now pruned and pulled down to twine around stair banisters, window curtains, doorways and pictures.

The forests were ransacked by "Uncle Jeff" and a bevy of happy pickaninnies. Boughs of rich, green holly, laden with their scarlet berries, were stuck in every available nook, wreathed up in garlands, and in stars and other pretty devices. The mistletoe hung from chandeliers, with its clusters of pearl-like berries, among its dull-green leaves, and sprays of fragrant cedar, dusted with flour, like snow-laden boughs, were placed in dark corners amid the red holly-berries. The whole house was agog!

Mammoth cakes were being baked in large ovens before the open kitchen fires,—pyramid and steeple cakes, that would cause Delmonico to open his eyes, were erected and frosted, and deftly draped with gold-leaf, little cupids and birds. Artistic and wonderful flowers were carefully formed with icing. Quarters of beef were corned—turkeys penned up and stuffed—hogs by the dozen were killed—every rafter in the "smoke-house" was festooned with sausages, done up in shucks and in skins; liver and bread puddings; hams and shoulders sweetly cured; and there were boxes of salted meats, enough to feed a whole regiment.

English plum puddings were boiled and hung in bags from the pantry walls. This was the Christmas cheer! Carolyn, now eagerly superintended everything, and was the very soul of mirth and gladness.

Every single negro on the broad plantation worshiped her, and as the large boxes daily arrived from the city, their broad smiles and knowing winks, spoke louder than words of their own expectations.

As they would lift each heavy box to the store-room, they would gleefully laugh and say: "Miss Car-line shuah must have a gol' mine in dis here box!" They dreamed of the Christmas gifts hidden away, and not one of them was ever forgotten.

It was the noblesse oblige of the master. Poor old Critty had been half-demented since her grandchild's tragic death. Evelina had fled to Carolyn for protection and had found it, so the old crone now clung to her child's friend, and followed her around like a dog. She often stole away to the two lone graves in the forest, and would sit beside them rocking and crooning for hours:

"Hush, lil-honey-gal, don' cry,
He will love you by an' by!
Sleep, my honey-gal, an' res',
Granny holds you on her bres'."

She would then take a knife from her pocket and kiss it and sing to it; for, its blade had been wet with Evelina's innocent blood.

The old crone had drawn it from the fatal wound in her heart, and had ever since worn it hidden in her dress. It became her Voodoo idol. "Granny knows lil-gal, who it was that druv you to it! Granny knows who struck you till de blood roll off your shoulders like red beads aroun' you. Granny knows! Jest wait, honey-gal, you'll res', bime-by!"

The old African's eyes then gleamed like a hidden snake's.

She would return from these pilgrimages subdued and seemingly content, and then squat down upon the floor near the graceful Carolyn, watching her as she twined the garlands, or she would break off sprays of holly for her. Carolyn always treated her with the gentlest kindness, and she humored the poor old soul's every whim. The heiress even helped her to twine wreaths to deck the two lonely graves in the wood, and with her own hands placed them on poor Edwin Roper's mound, little knowing the great love for her that lay buried there in that dead heart, now stilled forever.

Life is mostly a tragedy, unless we wish to make it a comedy.

One may play the part of a jester, and wear the cap and bells, even in the midst of a tragedy; and in these days, Carolyn wore her cap and bells to hide a doubting and an aching heart. For, the path of Duty was not so smooth, after all.

The news of her brilliant engagement was soon noised abroad.

Julian Charles heard it with bitterness and a poignant grief. He was only a hollow-eyed, legal drudge now.

"Mother!" he said, when he told her of it, "there must have been some terrible mistake of the past, which Carolyn would not explain to us. I know that she was never engaged to Kendricks; for, I heard of his reckless and shameful behavior in Washington; and, besides that, she would not now be openly engaged to this Mr. Gordon, if she had ever cared for Gus. Ah! she could never have loved that brute!

"Oh! mother, mother! the priceless wine of life is poured out for me in vain, and the cup shattered forever!

"God! What agony!" and the strong man shuddered, and hid his grief-blinded eyes.

"Julian, my dear boy, where is your manly pride? Don't let that light-minded Carolyn Howard boast that she has hurt you. I shall call formally on her and congratulate her to-morrow. You must, of course, meet her at Christmas as usual.

"Learn to school your feelings and veil your heart; put her away from it forever—forget her!

"There are many other lovely girls; any one of them you could now choose for your wife,—Maud Hastings could easily learn to love you; she has always admired you and sought your society. She is a handsome, brilliant woman!" said the fond mother, proudly; for, in her eyes, her son was peerless.

Julian started up excitedly, and cried: "Don't, mother! there is but one woman in the wide world for me,—I

could not love another. Marriage with any other woman is impossible. Carolyn would always come between us and turn my heart to ice! As I cannot love, I cannot wed. I will never break an honest woman's heart!—Never!"

"Julian, I implore you, for your pride's sake, learn to meet her calmly, and don't let that coquette glory in making a shuttle-cock of your tender heart, as well as of others. There is poor Gus Kendricks, now drinking himself to death, and living in open profligacy—do you wish to imitate his lofty example? Must all our young men be castaways?"

"No, mother mine, I think that this sorrow has made me strong.

"I will meet Carolyn as you wish, and I can congratulate her also. I must teach my lips to smile, though my heart be breaking. The great Talleyrand said, 'Words were given us to conceal thoughts.' I, at least, can school my lips to speak and smile.

"It's my trade, too, as a lawyer."

"That is my own brave boy!" cried Mrs. Charles, tiptoeing to kiss her tall son's white forehead.

Julian's face had now lost all of its weak lines, his ruling expression was strong and determined.

His thick, black hair fell in a wave over his forehead, and he had a habit of shaking his head, that would toss the locks away from his broad, white brow. It was said that his profile was like Byron's; his speaking eyes were softer than men's eyes usually are, and, yet, deep down within them, a hidden fire seemed to burn and glow. He was tall and athletic, and a look of hauteur was habitual to his pale face. It was the legacy of his Spanish blood. His English ancestor's stamina now aided him.

He had worked up his great case minutely, and as it had been postponed, he had returned from Washington in time to attend to it personally. On the trial he triumphed; he spoke so concisely, so earnestly, and his ar-

gument was so masterly, that the jury rendered their verdict in his favor, after an absence of only five minutes.

His first notable fee was a very large one, and, after that opening success he was eagerly sought after, and he moved now on the highway to fortune. Unconquered love had given him all the strength of a royal sorrow; and, he pressed on under its goad!

If ever a woman plotted to snare a heart on the rebound, Maud Hastings certainly did. She used all her wiles upon Julian during Carolyn's absence, and the news of her friend's engagement to Cleve Gordon was received with greatest joy by the now hopeful Maud. "He is mine, now!" her triumphant heart cried. "The one ban is lifted!"

As Philip and Julian were partners and intimate friends, they saw much of each other; and when Nina's and Philip's engagement was publicly announced, Maud essayed to be openly intimate with, and duly patronizing to sweet little Nina. She had her eyes fixed on her own marked-down game.

Julian went home to supper with his friend, Dr. Daniel Blake, one pleasant night shortly after Carolyn's return, and then, he and the confidential Nina had a cosy chat.

"Nina, I want to ask you a question," he said. "Do you believe that there was ever any truth in the story which Philip heard of Carolyn's positive engagement to Kendricks? And that yarn of his—kissing her?"

"Oh, Julian! to think what your lack of trust has caused," she faltered, and then Nina's eyes filled with tears. "I vowed to dear Carolyn that I would not tell you ever, but, now that she has gone off and finally engaged herself to a mere stranger, I will vindicate her honor. I must! She would die before she could bend her pride to explain the past to you. Oh, Julian! I know Carolyn once loved you most devotedly, and I do believe she still loves you. How could you ever believe my

grand, noble Carolyn to be so weak as to encourage that vile man, Kendricks! You knew better!"

"For God's sake, explain yourself, Nina!" cried Julian, grasping her hands, and she tremblingly complied. She told him the whole story of the stolen kiss, and of Kendricks' cowardly presumption, just as the indignant Carolyn had told her; and she did not omit to tell of the proud girl's tears and wounded pride, at Julian's lack of trust and faith. And, now he knew that the angel had passed him by in sorrowing love.

"Fool, fool that I am! Oh, Nina! I have lost my life's crown forever, by my own foolish actions.

"Carolyn! Carolyn!" he cried, excitedly, and he paced the floor like a restless wolf.

Nina ran after him and clasping his hands in hers, said: "Dear, dear Julian! I am so sorry for you both! Carolyn has now sacredly promised herself to another, and knowing her true heart as well as I do, I feel she can never love any one but you. And yet, I know that if she once gives her plighted allegiance to another, she will never break her word.

"O, Julian! why didn't you go to her frankly and demand an explanation? Where was your faith? So many people have had their life's happiness wrecked forever by simply not seeking the truth in time."

"Dear little Nina! I thank you for telling me at last; but, oh, if you had only told me sooner!

"She is worthy, she is still the woman I hoped, and, it makes me hate myself; but, I thank you, little friend. And now, good-night! I must be alone." He lifted her soft hands to his lips and then kissed them gently and left her.

Alone under the cold, pitiless stars, swinging far above him, in his hopeless love, he imagined her bright eyes appeared among those brilliant planets, and looked rebukingly down upon him.

"Ah! Carolyn! Carolyn! you are as far above my reach now as those silver lilies of Heaven!"

The mad fever of longing love in his blood would not be quieted. He walked on and on, down the firm, white road, bordered on either side by pine forests.

The wind moaned and shrieked there, wailing through the dark plumes of pine, like lost spirits, seeking their old, familiar abiding places. And sad thoughts haunted his hungry heart.

"A spirit in his feet" led the disconsolate lover to the beloved shades of "Sunset Manor." He went in from the fringing woods and passed along through the slaves' quarters.

There was a gay gathering, and from the cabin of "Uncle Jeff" came the sounds of merry-making, and laughter, and song. Some one was "picking a banjo" and singing in a mellow voice:

"Wake up, boys, don' make a noise,
While ole Marster's sleepin'—
Go down in de barn-yard, hab a little dance—
Hab a little banjo pickin'."

And then the rollicking chorus was trolled out by many musical voices:

"Git up in de mornin', git up in de mornin'—
Git up in de mornin', 'fore de break ob day!"

Julian paused to hear their rich, melodious voices ringing out on the still night air. How happy were those simple creatures in their ignorance! True—"where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise."

As Julian walked rapidly on, a dark shadow glided from under the trees and sprang menacingly before him, and then, a withered old crone peered eagerly, hungrily, into his face.

"No, no! honey-gal!" she muttered; "not yit!" and she darted back into the forest leaving Julian astonished

at the apparition. It was the poor, demented old Critty, whose broken voice swept through the forest in a weird witch song, that curdled the blood in the startled man's heart.

His nerves resumed their control, however, as he listened, sadly smiling, to the old slave's mournful plaint:

"Trouble gon'er weigh me down in de mornin'—
Trouble gon'er weigh me down;
Jes' so de tree fall, jes' so it lie,
Jes' so de sinner lib, jes' so he die.
Trouble gon'er weigh me down in de mornin'—
Trouble gon'er weigh me down!"

"Poor, unhappy soul! I feel in accord with her tonight," sighed Julian, who bore "a heart bowed down by weight of woe" in his breast. A light gleamed through the half-closed blinds of Carolyn's room;—he sighed deeply as he gazed upon it.

She was there now, busied, perhaps, in writing to her betrothed lover.

Ah, God! the agony of the thought. He felt like crying out, "Carolyn, Carolyn! Come to me, my lost darling, and let me hear your sweet voice once more!"

How long he stood gloomily fascinated there in the shadows he did not know, but at last the glimmering light was put out, and peaceful sleep and happy dreams wrapped "Sunset Manor" in their drowsy mantle.

"God bless you! my own lost darling!" groaned Julian, at last, and then, he retraced his solitary way homeward where his devoted mother still awaited him.

It was his one remaining comfort to kneel beside her with his head in her lap and unburden his tortured heart.

"Dear, dear boy, we have indeed misjudged Carolyn, and I grieve with you; it is too late now to fasten the severed bond. But I am glad to know she was true at heart,—our poor, proud Carolyn!"

With composure, and yet a lingering hope, Mrs.

Charles called on Carolyn and simply congratulated her upon her engagement.

The heiress was her own self, and they once more established the old friendly relations; for, Julian's mother was still her trusted and loving friend.

"Of course, I wish all of my old friends to meet Mr. Gordon," brightly said Carolyn, happy over the reconciliation, a truce which she had longed for. "And, I want you and Julian to dine with us on Christmas day. Please don't refuse me; it is my earnest wish. Dr. and Mrs. Blake and Nina will also come at six o'clock. Maud and Philip Hastings and their mother will also be our guests, and of course, Mr. McCay and Colonel Ashmore will fill their accustomed nooks. Uncle would be heart-broken to have a single one of our dear friends absent. And, so I count upon you," she said with trembling lips, for her heart was full.

"Thank you, dear Carolyn, we will both accept," said Mrs. Charles, kissing her a hearty good-bye, and then, she duly admired the artistic Christmas decorations, and was as sweet and sympathetic in her demeanor as of old.

Carolyn mistook her friend's motherly self-control and looked after the carriage with gloomy brows.

"She doesn't seem to care; neither does Julian. He is absolutely indifferent. My revenge has been all in vain, save to recoil upon my own unhappy heart and to sting it to the quick. I believe that Julian now loves that coquette Maud Hastings. Ah! my own destiny is fixed, and why should I break my heart?"

And, so, summoning her pride, with a flushed face, she received the mail bag from old Jeff's hands, and drew forth a thick letter from Washington. As she read the burning words of love therein, she tried to cozen herself into the belief that she was contented! But, in her heart, a mutinous angel cried, "No! No!"

In the cosy library, Judge Howard, Mr. McCay and

Colonel Ashmore were drawn up in a friendly circle around the fire, smoking their pipes of peace. The toddy pitcher was also merrily smoking between them, its fragrant clouds perfuming the air.

The Judge was explaining to them the lowering political outlook in Washington, and discussing the vigorous methods which the President had adopted to quell the defiant Mormons, and to establish national authority.

He was expatiating proudly on the wonders of the new Ocean Telegraph, which for the first time united two hemispheres, in the mystic girdle of Puck. A forty-minute tour across the sea!

His eager listeners would nod approval, and they sipped their toddies in epicurean comfort.

"This is, indeed, a glorious age that we live in," declared Colonel Ashmore.

"And, thank God, there are some glorious women still alive to adorn it, my friend!" laughed the Judge slyly, pointing down the driveway, to where Mrs. Charles' carriage was disappearing.

Colonel Ashmore's face grew a rosier red, as he bounded up, and sprang eagerly to the window.

"God bless her! She is a rare woman, a queen of women; but, she has brought about the Waterloo of my life!"

"Don't give up the gallant fight, my old friend; it takes valor and a brave front! You may win yet. If you could only get that unsettled Julian off her hands, into some other loving woman's," said McCay, with a Scotchman's shrewdness.

"Right! But, Carolyn has spoiled that cherished plan for me: Ah, well! 'Man proposes' and—the women play the devil with us! It's too bad, too bad!" sighed the Colonel. "My life is a wasted one."

"Well! let's fill up our glasses and 'drink dull care awa'.' It is cold outside in the callous world; let us all keep our hearts warm within with jovial fires, and that

will bring content! For, the spirit we have always with us," cried the Judge—and, he might have added—the spirits!

With brightened faces they arose, as their host cheerily cried:

"Here's to your future joy, Ashmore—'Luck and unity, and a better opportunity!'" and they merrily clinked glasses, and drank the toast with gusto.

BOOK III—THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN OLD-TIME CHRISTMAS IN THE SOUTH.—AN OLD LOVE NEWLY BORN.

The joyfully-expected Christmas eve arrived at last, and with it the happy lover, Mr. Cleve Gordon.

The hospitable old Judge had his grand family coach polished and oiled until it shone like a circus chariot.

Uncle Jeff, its trusted driver, felt his own high importance, resplendently clad in his green and gold livery, and a tall beaver hat with a brilliant yellow cockade attached. He mounted the box in state, and held the spirited bays in check, with a firm hand.

The whole family pride shone in his dusky face.

The elegantly-attired city visitor stepped lightly from the train, his delicate face was radiant with expectation, and he looked a modern Prince Charming. He seemed to have stepped from a French bandbox, instead of an old-time railway train, rumbling along at its easy jog!

The Judge greeted the prospective bridegroom most warmly, and they entered the carriage and drove through the gossip-harboring town, where numerous heads were eagerly poked out from open windows, and the curious eyes of the villagers watched to see "that proud Carolyn Howard's city beau" pass by. Every one was excited over the engagement.

The sun was now setting, and its trailing banners of red and gold decked the western sky, gleaming out above the dark pine forests.

The balsamic odors of the turpentine-yielding trees was invigorating to Gordon, after the stuffiness of the primitive cars.

Carolyn Howard, fitly gowned in scarlet silk, with holly-berries wreathed in her bronze-gold hair, stood on the piazza, as the stately coach came slowly up the long avenue of live oaks, and stopped beside the steps, with a grand flourish.

With the grace of a reigning queen receiving an ambassador, the southern beauty welcomed her long-expected northern lover.

In the background of the garden stood a crowd of happy slaves, their grins revealing their priceless ivories as they bowed and curtesied a hearty welcome to the coming lord.

They gladly dropped their coonskin caps to "Mars Gordon, the young missus' sweetheart;" for, they shared the pride of the union to be.

Little had Cleve Gordon comprehended the splendor of the old-time southern hospitality until then, when he was made to feel the truth of the Judge's open-armed greeting,—"Welcome, thrice welcome! my house and all it contains is yours. Eat, drink and be merry; for our home larders are well stocked! Fortune has emptied her horn of plenty upon my household!"

"Carolyn! Darling! this is the proudest hour of my life," cried the happy lover, as he drew her away into the dim twilight of the great parlors and clasped her shrinking form to his breast.

So thrilled was he that he failed to notice that his kisses were not returned in kind, but only suffered as a cold tribute.

"It seems that I came into a kingdom when I won my queen!" he murmured.

He was wrapped up in his own heart happiness.

"So you did, Cleve; and you will always find here faithful, willing subjects in my trusty, worthy colored people. Here is little Toby, now, my own page. He has come to show you to your apartments.

"Dinner will be served in half an hour, and then, you must see us place the time-honored yule log in the hall fireplace! I will keep you busy after that; for, I have one hundred stockings to fill, and you must be my aide de camp—you must help me to play Santa Claus"—and then, she laughed gayly at his astonished face, for he knew not that the masters, in love waited on their own slaves at this festival.

One by one the stars had slowly disappeared. A faint, pink glow still shone afar in the eastern heaven, where one large silver star trembled on high as if for joy.

Christmas day was being heralded in by the shrill notes of chanticleers, and a mysterious expectancy seemed to hang over the dreaming world, as if all Nature held her breath for some great coming event!

As the first gleam of daybreak crept into the cabins, the negroes were all alert and awake. Up popped each little black, kinky head as the joy-filled pickaninnies cried aloud:

"Chris'mus gif'! Chris'mus gif'!"

Old Jeff sallied forth with his lighted pine torch to kindle the fires in "de big house," and then all the expectant house-servants headed by Mammy followed in his wake.

Judge Howard was already aroused and was even then expecting them; for old Jeff had kindled his master's fires, and caught his Christmas gift, the very first of all, ever since he could remember. The red light of the torches stole in through the blinds and danced in crimson glow over the walls.

The musing Judge gazed at it delightedly, as he recalled the old happy visions of his childhood.

A nervous hand stealthily tried the door; it opened to the touch, and then a lusty voice shouted, "Chris'mus gif', Master! Oh, I cotch you fuss!" followed by a joyous laugh.

"Yes, you have me this time, Jeff!" the hearty old gentleman replied, gayly, as though for the first time in his life!

"Chris'mus gif'! Chris'mus gif', Miss Car'line!" now resounded from the hall, and, a beautiful vision clad in a rose-colored wrapper, with long, unbound hair, sprang into their midst, crying, "O, Mammy, you know I caught you first!" and then her doting old nurse hung around her young mistress' knees, beaming with love and joy, as the gracious Carolyn wished them each and all a Merry Christmas.

Cleve Gordon, too, had heard the joyous summons, and his own heart thrilled with pride and rapture at the thought of soon possessing this peerless creature for his very own; for, she lightly ruled all hearts this day.

Breakfast was ready at an early hour: and such a breakfast!

First of all, great bowls of stinging egg-nog were prepared and freely ladled out to every one on the plantation, and it was strong enough to warm every heart, and to brighten every eye.

Judge Howard stood on the back piazza, surrounded by his band of devoted slaves, and made them a heart-stirring speech of genuine welcome, good-cheer and kindness.

Even his old nurse, Aunt Milly, had hobbled in from her fireside to catch her "young massa's" Christmas gift; for to her he was still the young master. She believed and affirmed that she was one hundred and forty years old, and during his long recollection the ancient dame had not changed one whit, and had, most remarkable to relate, claimed the same number of years as long as her master could remember.

Carolyn stood, beaming with smiles, there beside him, and merrily distributed the well-crammed stockings to every child on the plantation.

There were presents for all of them, forgetting the little peccadillos of the unruly. The adult negroes had their own feast already prepared in the old-fashioned yard-kitchen, where they could revel in their own games, dances, and plantation music.

They were all as free and joyous as if the old liberty bell hung over their woolly heads, to chime off the golden hours!

By five o'clock, the dinner guests had arrived, and assembled in the drawing rooms, which were transformed into fragrant Christmas bowers.

Gray clouds had gathered and a light snow was beginning to fall: the snow witch was picking her geese, and casting off their white feathers in honor of the festal day.

In the back "drawing-room," stood a mammoth holly tree, laden with the rich and numerous family gifts, and bedecked in a most wonderful manner.

Julian Charles had greeted Cleve Gordon with a constrained politeness, and then, with a feverish assumed gayety, he helped to hand the gifts down from the tree.

He carelessly lifted down a white velvet case, but his trembling lips refused to read off the inscription!

So, with a wintry smile, he simply placed it silently in Carolyn's hands.

"For my peerless Carolyn, from her betrothed, Cleve Gordon." As she read the inscription she flushed, and her heart contracted with a sudden pain. With trembling fingers she opened the case, and there, on a bed of pink velvet, lay a necklace of rarely perfect pearls.

Her proud lover hastened to her side, and stooped over her, and clasped the beautiful bauble tenderly around her snowy throat. As his hands touched her yielding flesh, she shuddered slightly, and Julian's jealous, love-quick-

ened eyes detected it with a secret joy. His heart bounded as he saw this sign of her hidden emotions.

He was not alone in his suffering!

Colonel Ashmore then handed down a huge bottle of old Scotch whisky to Mr. McCay,—one that would have made "Old Rosin the Beau's" "big bellied bottle" blush for shame!

The undaunted Scotchman turned the laugh on them all by hugging it to his breast, and he delightedly caressed it, as one would a beloved infant.

Every one later exchanged personal gifts, and a rousing, merry time they had of it.

After all the tokens were distributed, the guests went into the grand dining-room, and, as Colonel Ashmore said, "Enjoyed a feast fit for the gods on Mount Olympus!" "Gad, Carolyn! I would like to be in a mountain of this 'tipsy-squire' and have to eat my way out of it!" the old bon vivant cried.

Old York was detailed to help the pompous old Jeff wait on the table, and it fell to his lot to brew the Christmas punch.

Nina and Philip sat beside each other, and as they could not resist love's promptings, they secretly squeezed hands under the table.

Maud Hastings sat beside Julian, and the scheming girl was radiant with joy, for he had presented her with a gold heart-shaped locket, richly set with rubies.

Julian felt his old recklessness ruling him again, and he drank far more wine than was good for him. It was a self-surrender in desperation.

"Your heart is so lovely, Julian," whispered Maud, "I can't tell you how much I will prize it! I will wear your heart in my bosom forever." Her voice was as rich as the golden gurgle of wine this night.

"I trust that you will, Maud, for I give it unreservedly to you!" he said, desperately.

She threw an insinuatingly meaning glance at him and sighed, as her splendid bosom heaved.

"Don't you think Carolyn far too rosy to wear red, Julian?" she asked, fixing her thrilling eyes upon him.

"I had not noticed: excuse me, but your own beauty overshadows all others to-night, Maud. Yellow certainly is turned to gold by you. You are a witch of fascination!" he whispered.

Maud was in a seventh heaven of delight, and her heart leaped up in newly-born hopes.

Her spell was potent at last!

Colonel Ashmore chivalrously entertained his wary queen of hearts, Mrs. Charles; and, the faithful old York, who stood behind his master's chair, never allowed the old patrician's glass to be empty.

Mr. McCay, Dr. Blake, and Judge Howard were vying with each other in telling their richly-flavored jokes, and heartily laughing at them. It was a duel of wit, on the plan of "You tickle me, and I'll tickle you!"

Mrs. Doctor Dan and Mrs. Hastings were dreaming in a glow of quiet contentment, matching bits of gossip, and doing full justice to the bountiful feast. They were not entangled in Love's snares. Cleve Gordon was wandering in a lover's Paradise—a fool's Paradise, if he only knew it!

Carolyn assumed a brightness that could not hide the flitting fevers that raged hidden within her unhappy heart. Julian's love-quickened eyes read her well, and his soul grimly exulted; for, he knew now, that he did not suffer alone!

They lingered happy hours at the table, the beaux responding to the merry toasts and laughing at the veiled witticisms, until the hostess arose. On this signal, the ladies adjourned to the parlor and the gentlemen departed to the smoking-room.

After that came the hour of music! Mr. McCay sang with great feeling "The Harp That Once Through Tara's

Halls," causing the harps of Memory to vibrate in every heart: and under its influence Carolyn then sang with touching sweetness, "Ever of Thee, I'm Fondly Dreaming;" but, adroitly casting languishing glances at the little Scotchman, to every one's amusement. She was quietly defensive now.

The wine and the music moved the romance lingering in the blood of each of them, and together they joined in singing "Annie Laurie," "Star of the Evening," and "Way Down on de Swanee River."

After much importuning, the reluctant Colonel Ashmore sang to Carolyn's accompaniment, in a full baritone voice, "Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes;" meanwhile, he looked imploringly at Mrs. Charles, and openly revealing the old, old story, known by all!

The obdurate lady stood in the center of the room, looking truly regal, in a black velvet and old point lace costume.

She, however, seemed not to notice her faithful wooer. As the song was ended, Colonel Ashmore's eyes suddenly brightened, and he darted to his lady's side, and, catching her hands nimbly, exclaimed triumphantly, "The penalty! You are under the mistletoe bough! I claim the right to a Christmas kiss." She blushed, and drew back—the Colonel hesitated a moment, but his old chums applauded and gayly urged him on.

"O, it's fair! You can't refuse a kiss under the mistletoe, Mrs. Charles," the merry chorus chimed in.

The Colonel looked as expectant and rosy as a schoolboy, as he towered there above the woman he loved, looking down in the gentlest fidelity upon her.

"If you will stick to the promise voiced in your song, my friend, 'I will place a kiss within the bowl if you'll not look for wine'—you have already imbibed too freely," laughed the blushing lady.

The Colonel's eyes gleamed then in joy. "One kiss, just one kiss, and, I swear to eschew wine, henceforth

and forever!" he cried, desperately; and so, she gracefully allowed a single, chaste salutation,—one that, like a sip of old Burgundy, only made the Colonel thirst for more. And, with a gentle deceit, she flattered herself that she was a public benefactor, and sacrificing herself!

Old York, and the open-eyed house-servants stood in the hall, listening to the music, and as Colonel Ashmore victoriously kissed the blushing Mrs. Charles, York slapped his thigh and cried out joyously, "Dare now, bress Gord! if my Marse Henry didn't git thare dat time!" and he made a sudden dive for Beckie's buxom waist and despite her feeble resistance planted a regular blunderbuss smack on her mouth.

"Go 'way, nigger, or I'll knock yo' head off!" cried the panting and indignant damsel.

"O, hush, Beckie, my own gal: ef Miss Ma'y can let de Colonel kiss her, you can't refuse yo' ole, faithful York!"

So, she kindly relented and he returned to the charge with a double-barreled kiss, which brought down the house.

After merry games, and a romping Virginia reel, in which all the guests joined, to the gay music of the negro's string band, they had the annual display of fireworks on the lawn back of the house. For Christmas is the Fourth of July, down South.

Then they escorted their bewildered and charmed Northern guest to the quarters to see the fantastic negro dancers. Buxom young girls, clad in neat, blue homespun frocks, with their kinky hair rolled up in cotton strings, or carded out in fluffs like black wool, and the older women resplendent in their many-colored bandannas; strong men with corded, muscled arms, bared to the elbow, and broad leathern belts tightened around their waists, were dancing away with the power of every muscle in their bodies.

Their very hearts and souls seemed to rejoice in the

dance! It was a revelation of native grace in weird, fantastic movement to Cleve Gordon.

The wee small hours were coming upon them before the merry party dreamed of separating for the night. After accepting Colonel Ashmore's invitation to meet at the Hermitage next morning for a forest bird hunting party, and to spend the next evening at his hospitable home, they made their mutual adieux.

And, all but Carolyn and Julian Charles voted it an evening never to be forgotten.

One of those clear, cold days that visit at times even the sunny south, came blustering in the next day. It had snowed heavily during the night and the drifts had frozen over.

Every dark-green pine tree and each naked giant oak was now clad in a glittering armor of ice, and feathery fringes of long, delicate icicles decked the garments of winter.

A deep blue sky was vaulted overhead, and the sun shone out gloriously, turning the whole earth to a casket of flashing jewels

A merry party wended their way to the Hermitage and assembled there by eleven o'clock, ready for the fray. Judge Howard had bought Carolyn a riding horse, resembling her lost Erebus.

She had named the new comer Pluto, as he was so fiery of spirit and black of coat.

Carolyn had formally returned "May Queen" to Mr. Kendricks as soon as she arrived from Washington. She had hoped to be spared his annoying presence, and yet, what was her astonishment to find Kendricks seated on the dainty "May Queen" and making one of the gay hunting party.

He, however, greeted Carolyn with a grave politeness, but he absolutely ignored Gordon,—much to that happy lover's secret amusement.

Cleve Gordon did not sit his horse like a centaur, but

he still managed to keep in the saddle. He was not at his best.

Carolyn felt a little chagrin when she saw him moving along timidly beside Julian Charles, who rode his high-spirited mare, superbly.

The discarded lover seemed to try and bring all of his graceful accomplishments into play for her especial benefit.

It was a silently acted revenge.

Maud Hastings was Julian's riding companion.

Once she artfully dropped her whip, and Julian, who was going at a clipping fine pace, quickly pulled one foot from the stirrup and reached lightly down and gracefully picked up the whip without slackening his charger's speed. He then swung up in an erect posture and laughingly returned it to Maud, who was loud in her praises.

Gordon secretly envied Julian's dexterity and his splendid horsemanship; but the accepted lover was too happy to feel more than a passing jealousy.

However, the conscious knowledge of Julian's superiority in everything now rankled in Carolyn's proud heart. And, he rode as a cavalier,—at her slanderer's side!

Colonel Ashmore greeted his guests merrily from the piazza where he stood already booted and spurred, with his well-trained pointers beside him. His hunting-horse was being led up and down by a stable boy.

They were all soon in the saddle, and waited ready for the inevitable stirrup-cup.

The Colonel mounted and rallied his guests.

Then, after partaking of the liquid cheer, with laughter they rode gayly away through the sparkling forest. It was glistening before them like a mystical fairy land of diamonds and gems: the very diamond valley of Sindbad materialized!

Many a "molly cotton-tail" helped to fill the growing game bags, and the coveys of partridges were plentiful.

The chattering gray squirrels plumped down from the trees.

They passed over the very spot where poor Erebus had met his tragic end, and both Julian and Kendricks silently glanced at Carolyn's agitated face. They both detected the memory-painted shadows that swept across it there.

Ah, they had both loved and wooed and lost her! They were now equals in sorrows—they had both lost fair Carolyn Howard forever! She rode along seemingly happy beside her accepted suitor, and strangely enough, as their horses all broke into a canter, there came near being a very serious accident to bring tragedy into the comedy.

Kendricks' gun very mysteriously exploded, as if by accident, and the heavy ball whistled past Gordon's ears. It was a close call! It cut a gaping hole in his riding hat.

Every one was startled by this alarming event, and Kendricks was profuse in his apologetic regret for his clumsiness. But the excuse was transparent for such an expert hunter. Carolyn flashed a withering glance upon him, and her lip curled with a silent contempt!

She alone doubted the accidental discharge of the gun! He, a mighty hunter, and the pride of the local sportsmen. She also knew that he was capable of the meanest plot in revenge.

Nothing, however, dampened the ardor and joy of that day's chase, after the supposed accident. The hunt was a great success as to both game and fun, and they all returned in high feather to the Hermitage, near sunset.

They sat down in peace to enjoy the bountiful dinner set before them, to which they had brought the very best of all sauces—an appetite sharpened by their long ride through the bracing, crisp December air!

Then they had jolly dancing and merry Christmas games in the broad hall of the Hermitage.

Mrs. Charles and Colonel Ashmore led off in the Vir-

ginia Reel,—a splendid pair; and old Melodious fiddled and called out the quaint figures of the cotillion, until his arm was benumbed and his mellow voice grew hoarse. There was no dance complete anywhere in the country without "Me-lo-dous," and his celebrated fiddle, "ole broad mouth;" and, though he belonged to Colonel Ashmore, he was always willing to lend him to his neighbors for an evening frolic.

As Julian and Carolyn met in the rounds of the dance and duly clasped their hands, the strongest electric thrills would dart through both of them. Dissembling as they were, they dared not let their passion laden eyes speak, for their rebellious hearts shone through them.

The memory of the last loving evening which they had spent together at the old Hermitage still haunted them!

Gordon's formal attentions and conspicuous devotions had wearied out Carolyn. Her nerves rebelled and she almost resented these semi-public caresses, while Julian was near; for they secretly maddened her. After the dance, Colonel Ashmore bore Carolyn away to admire a pair of fine elk antlers, which had been sent him by a distant friend: and the spirited Maud Hastings gladly entertained Mr. Gordon by recounting the quaint romances and old legends of the Hermitage; for it had its own ghost and hidden room.

The Colonel was called suddenly from Carolyn's side on hospitable duties, and thus, she was left alone for a few moments. Taking advantage of his absence, she fled away to the library and looked out silently upon the frozen landscape. Her very heart seemed frozen now, as the unhappy tears stood in her eyes. Her self-control was shaken.

Julian had missed her at once, and his watchful love soon led him to find out her retreat.

She was lingering on the deep window seat, screened from view between the velvet curtains. She heard him

coming—she knew his step—and she quickly drew back into the shadows and held the curtains close about her. But he could have found her had he been both blind and deaf! He at once parted the velvet hangings with trembling fingers and grasped her hands, crying in a voice of passionate anguish, "Carolyn, it is useless! I cannot live without you, my own darling! I know now that you love me still: you do not love this man to whom you have foolishly pledged yourself! It was only a wounded pride that caused you to foreswear your own true heart and crush it down. Cara mia, break it off! Come back to me, my beloved! I cannot live without you!"

"Julian! you are mad! You presume too much, sir. I am Cleveland Gordon's affianced wife," she gasped.

"The Howards have never been known to break their pledged word, and I certainly will not be the first to stain the family record of honor. No! I will abide by my own free choice. Julian, I do not love you!" her pale lips faltered on the lie, and then, she shuddered; but, she dared not face him, and he read her secret.

"Carolyn, it is false! You still love me! You do love me, darling!" and then, he drew her fiercely to his breast and rained upon her white lips a storm of wild, passionate kisses.

Such kisses as he never dared dream of before! Upon her eyes, her forehead, her hair, her lips, the burning kisses fell in fiery rain.

Helpless and powerless she lay there, clasped in his embrace, with a mad joy surging through her throbbing veins!

An overwhelming desire to belong to this one man on earth alone, was taking a riotous possession of her.

She was blinded by the hot blood that rushed to her head; her trembling limbs refused to support her. It seemed that an upheaval of volcanic fires burned within her breast, as she resistlessly received those fierce caresses. She suffered, but did not dare to return them!

A delirium of exultation took possession of Julian, as he cried hoarsely, "You do love me, darling! Darling, darling, you shall be mine! Before God, I swear it!" And, his fate trembled in the balance, now.

When the frenzied Kendricks had kissed her, she knew that he was loathsome to her, for his very touch was desecration. When her affianced love, Gordon, had kissed her in his exultation, she knew that she could never love him. But now, when Julian kissed her in this moment of sweet agony, she knew that he, alone, had the power to awaken that mad, one desire of a woman's heart, for love and caresses. It burned even now within her soul!

A voice suddenly sounded, ringing gayly through the hall near by, calling, "Carolyn! Carolyn! Where are you?" And, then Nina abruptly entered the room, "Caro, —are you here? Mr. Gordon has asked for you several times, and seems anxious."

The spell was broken!

"Go!" panted the excited Carolyn, pressing her hands against Julian's breast, and pushing him wildly away from her. "You,—you are insolent! Go now, and never, never enter my presence again!" and then, she sank down upon her knees in a storm of tears.

Julian was deathly pale, and he stood there dazed, looking down upon her, but a lurid light burned in his wild eyes, as he grasped Nina's hands crying fiercely and in pain: "Go to her, Nina; go and quiet her! I have frightened her! I have been a mad fool! O, God! I am going mad!" and, then he fled away out into the night, as Nina pushed aside the curtains and knelt down beside the half-senseless Carolyn Howard.

"What is it, Caro? Speak, dearest! This will never do, every one has missed you! Don't be weak enough to weep or your eyes will betray you! Rouse yourself, for Mr. Gordon's sake!"

Carolyn sprang erect. "Don't weep? I am not weep-

ing. Why! I am only laughing! O, Nina! ha, ha, ha!" and a peal of hysterical laughter burst from her lips.

"Come on with me now. I will bathe my eyes in the guest chamber, and so, go down to my betrothed: he must not be anxious about me for a single moment. Come, dear Nina, and you can help me to join them without remark. I was only taking a little lesson in astronomy, and other heavenly things! The stars are simply wonderful to-night! I have discovered some new and glorious constellations, with Julian's instructions!"

Wondering and greatly frightened, the loyal Nina followed Carolyn as she danced through the halls and sped to an upper chamber.

After a bit of feminine toilet magic, with their arms fondly entwined, Nina and Carolyn calmly entered the parlor, looking as merry and rosy and bright as any of the revelers. No one suspected the past storm!

Woman's mysterious, self-protecting ways never fail.

"Such fun I have had, dear Colonel, getting Uncle York to teach me to make Mr. McCay's nectar, Scotch-punch: really, I think I should like to sit under a fountain of it forever, in the shades of some happy Elysium," she cried, and, then, Carolyn laughed gayly and linked her arm through Mr. McCay's. "Come now, child of Burns, and sing for me 'Here's to the Lass with the Bonny Blue E'en,' only, you must say brown e'en, or else I shall be a green-eyed monster forever more! You are to be my loyal minstrel." The elated little Scotchman willingly sang the requested song, and so merry was the chattering that followed that Julian's absence was not commented upon. For, they were all egotistically happy. They now begged the high-spirited Carolyn to sing to them, and in a reckless gayety she sang, "O, Whistle, and, I Will Come to You, My Lad!" The enraptured McCay kept his lips with the puckering-string drawn, as he whistled in accompaniment with the piano. Then the reck-

less Carolyn changed the chord suddenly and drifted into "I'm Over Young to Marry Yet!"

She cast impish glances at her delighted lover, as she tossed back her fair head, and the melody flowed saucily from her full throat—

"I'm over young, I'm over young—
I'm over young to marry yet;
I'm over young, 'twould be a sin,
To take me from my mammy yet!"

The revel seemed endless to the distracted girl!

But, all things have an end: even joy—and sorrow, too, thank God! Only love endureth forever!

And so, that night upon the two parted lovers rested the consciousness that they did not dare to trifle longer with the love that had been! For, its tender shadow stealing back upon them had more power for the one than the promise shining in Cleveland Gordon's glistening pearls of price! For the other, the half-veiled glance of Carolyn Howard's eyes, had fanned into fiercest flames the old passion that he had dreamed buried in safety within his breast forever. Silence was possible, heart-break hovered before them; but they did not dare to look into each other's eyes and lie before the altar of the great God of Love!

The lost love was burning and throbbing now—even under the mantle of Christmas snows, and Carolyn Howard followed her lover in her dreams out into the chill of the night! As she unclasped Gordon's pearls from her ivory neck, she tossed them away, without a glance! She saw her own accusing eyes in the mirror, and she shuddered as she whispered, "I love him! My God! I love him yet! And—Julian knows it now! For, never again can I deny it!" The fatal secret filled their two unhappy hearts in the long night watches.

CHAPTER XIV.

A STAB IN THE DARK!—CAROLYN'S RACE WITH DEATH!

As Augustus Kendricks rode homeward that night, after the failure of his cowardly attempt to kill Gordon, he was in a bitterly rebellious mood. It had galled him to see the publicly manifested happiness of his successful northern rival.

The glorious woman whom he had pursued was now unattainable, and hence, more desirable to his madly aroused passions.

The thought simply frenzied him! He plunged his spurs unmercifully into poor "May Queen's" delicate flanks, as he hoarsely muttered, "Curse them both! I swear that I will outwit them yet!" There was murder in his heart, but an avenging Fate was stalking at his heels, even then!

The weird night ride of "Tam o'Shanter" would not have been more uncanny, had the man but realized it.

The night was so clear, so peacefully beautiful, that even the evil deeds of his past did not haunt him in this hallowed hour.

He had caused those near to him much unhappiness, and he had given but little pleasure to any one in the world. He had not even used the splendid gifts with which Nature had liberally endowed him, save in passionate pleasures, and reckless wrong-doing.

Fate, grim Fate, now awaited to settle with him, and close his dark record. As he reached his own "Riverside Plantation," a black shadow stealthily and swiftly glided up behind him, keeping well in the shade of the trees.

But, the planter in his pride of life recked not of the lurking avenger!

He reached his home in safety and sprang off from his foaming horse, and then, holding her by the bridle, he shouted, harshly, "Here! Sam! Sam! come quickly, and rub down May Queen, and then put her at once in the stable." His loud voice drowned the stealthy footsteps creeping up behind him.

Suddenly, the stooping figure sprang up erect! A glittering knife flashed out in the moonlight, and then, it was buried to the hilt beneath Kendricks' left shoulder blade!

With a half shriek, and a last sickening, hollow groan, he fell prone on his face.

"Take dat! an' dat! an' dat! you brute! you dog!" a shrill voice shrieked. "One for ebery cruel blow dat you struck on my poo' chile's lil-shoulders! You druv her to deth! Go! git yoor own reward now!" Old Critty laughed loudly, in a fiendish glee, as the blood-reeking blade was plunged again deeply into the dead man's back, and left quivering there. There was a rush of coming feet. "My Gord! My Gord! Whut you been an' done, Granny!" shrieked the astounded Sam as he dashed up. "May Queen" had fled away to her own stable, and old Critty stood there erect, glowering down at the murdered man, with her wild eyes rolling, and her mouth foaming like a rabid dog's.

"You luved my honey-gal, Sam. You luved poo' lil' Evelina! He beat her; he try to ruin her too, the dog! He driv her to deth. She couldn't res' in her grave! She cry out for me to sen' him 'fore de great King; an' now she can sleep at las'! Yes, my honey-gal can res' now!" And, with a muffled cry of relief, the crazed old crone fled back into the forest's gloomy shades.

Poor Sam, who had no cause to love his brutal master, and who had been nearly crazed by Evelina's death, stood there jibbering like one dazed. He could never

have mustered the nerve to have struck those deadly blows! He was only a kind-hearted, honest beast of burden, bearing his daily yoke uncomplainingly.

The knife left sticking in the wound the hostler at once recognized as the deadly weapon so long borne in poor Evelina's breast. He stooped over the body, and, drawing it out, wiped it on his coat and then thrust it into his breast.

Alas! Poor fool!

He did not notice or care that the blood had smeared his sleeves and trousers as he knelt there, and then turned the white, still face up to the light. But, seeing those glazed eyes, and still scowling brows, the stern countenance frightened him almost to death!

He arose, and with a wild cry fled away, dashing on, on, into the depths of the forest. His situation filled his heart with terror unspeakable. He had seen his master die! He heard the last blow struck! He could not be the man to betray poor old Granny, and he determined to hide in the swamps, until he could make a rough "dug-out," and then he would float away down the river and escape. Anywhere out of reach of those glazing, cruel eyes!

So, at last, his simple slaves found Kendricks' body, still lying where he died, on the next morning. There he lay, their grim master, stiff and stark and dead!

He rested with upturned ghastly face, a horrible death mask, beneath the morning sunlight.

They turned and fled in terror into Camden town, and on the way, they told every one of the crime. Several men stopped at Judge Howard's with the startling news.

Mr. Gordon and the old Magistrate were soon at the deserted plantation, where Dr. Blake, Colonel Ashmore, and Mr. McCay, with the sheriff and many other men, soon joined them. The curious crowd soon numbered hundreds!

Poor, foolish slave Sam was missing! It was a well-

known fact that Kendricks was always most brutal to his slaves, and all supposed that he must have been drinking heavily and on arriving home at a late hour, had perhaps abused the stolid Sam, who had avenged himself at last!

The circumstantial evidence was seemingly clear.

An old coon-skin cap with a pendant tail, that every negro on the plantation recognized as Sam's, was found near by. It lay in a pool of the master's congealed blood!

The indignant white men, furious at the crime, at once organized a posse to go in chase of the murderer. The bloodhounds were quickly brought out from their kennels, and the cap with the blood upon it was shown them. They sniffed at it eagerly and howled furiously as they nosed the ground. Then, followed by the men, they made off for the swamps, with low, thirsty yelps in chorus!

The formal inquest was at once held, and all that remained of the rich young planter was laid out in state in the fine old drawing room, where his coveted bride-to-be would never reign! The frightened slaves hovered back in their log-cabins, not daring to betray the satisfaction hidden in their hearts! At night, however, they had a grand "wake" and a mass prayer meeting, and then crooned away at their mournful dirges all night long, while the house dogs, cooped up in their kennels, bayed sadly to the moon.

Almost every one in the vicinity, moved by a morbid curiosity, or the sympathy of caste, soon visited the scene of this notable murder. They looked in solemn awe upon the dead face of Augustus Kendricks, now bathed in that mysterious light which the death angel leaves lingering with its victims.

There was a veiled warning to the proud planters hidden there—one poor worm had turned—a serpent at last!

Carolyn, and the merry party, with whom the dead planter had spent the preceding jolly evening, were al-

most prostrated by the startling shock, and resultant nervousness.

The loud-voiced indignation of the leading white men of the town, and of the adjoining plantations, told that short work would be made of the wretched murderer when he was brought to the bar of justice.

The poor terror-stricken fugitive in his hiding place heard afar the baying of the bloodhounds! He trembled at the fierce shouts of the pursuers. They were at last nearing his lair!

He listened for a few moments in wildest terror, and then turned and fled toward the water. He waded on by the dim light of the moon, stumbling through the bogs and mire, often plunged in mud up to his knees. It was a slime from which he could hardly draw out his bleeding and nearly frozen feet!

His shoes had been lost in some muddy hole—and, hatless and shoeless, he fled madly on toward the river.

If he could only reach the water, to cover his trail!

When he at last had gained the bank of the broad stream he plunged boldly in to swim across—alas! It was a fatal mistake!

Some of the fierce pursuers had just fastened their boat to a tree and were preparing to land, when they espied him swimming for life, and so quickly fired a volley at him.

He dived deeply under the water. They followed his wake and saw his black woolly head rise out of the moonlit stream. Nearly dead with terror, the strong swimmer reached the opposite bank; but, only to fall into the hands of the other hunters, who eagerly watched on that side!

They seized the cowering wretch with yells of triumph.

With curses and blows, they then tied his bleeding hands behind his back and marched him on before them, back to the ill-fated plantation from which he had fled.

Poor wretch! He was hungry and cold and shivered

in abject terror. Fear paralyzed his tongue, for he well knew the hideous vengeance that would be meted out to him. The grim dogs, and the other searchers on the far shore were signaled that the runaway slave was captured. They all soon joined the maddened crowd that reached River Side at break of day.

Sam was soon locked within the stable and closely guarded there under the rifle muzzle, while the searchers sought for refreshment and a needful rest. Carolyn Howard had not slept throughout all this sad night!

Gordon and Judge Howard had not yet returned, as they had watched beside the bier of the dead planter, with Colonel Ashmore, Dr. Dan, and Mr. McCay as companions.

Carolyn was restless and excited; there was no sleep for her, so she arose early and went out alone for a walk in the cold morning air. She saw the sun god rise in splendor and bathe the sleeping earth in its golden glory.

She walked on unattended into the depths of the forest, where she suddenly heard a crooning voice singing mournfully:

"Say, poor sinner, run upon a rock,
De day de moon go down in blood;
Hide yo' face on de mountain top—
Hide yo' face from Gord! Huh! Hah!
O, walk an' talk wid Jesus!
Glory hallelujah! Glory in my soul! Huh! Hah!"

The poor old creature sat beside the grave of Evelina, bending down, and rocking and clapping her withered hands as she sang the weird words of the accusing hymn.

"Aunt Critty! What are you doing here?" the girl cried, touching the old woman's shoulder, and then Carolyn looked down steadily into the dazed eyes. There was no reason in them now!

"I'se singin' my pore lil-chile to sleep, Missus! She so happy now, I kill him! I stick him, one, two, free,

foo times in de back! He fall down like a stuck hog! an' de blood, his blood, run out in ribbers! Her knife sent him to hell: Sam cum up, an' he wuz awful skeered. He holler, an' I cum away here to tell my lil-gal! O! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Huh! Hah!" she jabbered, as she rolled her eyes and began to sway once more.

The frightened mistress shuddered and quickly drew back.

"Aunt Critty! do you mean to tell me that you murdered Mr. Kendricks?" she slowly asked in a fearsome whisper. The light was dawning upon the strange crime.

"Yes'm, yes'm, young Mistis! She cudn't res' in her grave, an' she cry out fur his blood! I done kill him, an' now she res' an' sleep. Yes! tank Gord, I dun kill dat debil, myself!"

"O God! how horrible!" wailed the affrighted Carolyn. "Where did you see him, Aunt Critty?" she faltered.

The demented old hag then laughed cunningly.

"I foller him like a panter-cat, trou de dark woods! De moon was high an' brite! He git down off de hoss, an' cuss Sam to hurry up, an' den I slip up rite soft behin' him, an' strike de knife in hard an' deep! Yes, hard an' deep, tank Gord!"

"Glory in my soul! Huh! Hah!"

Again she was wandering in her ravings!

"My God! how terrible!" again cried Carolyn, and she pulled her skirts away from the murderous old creature. But, a sudden thought came to her!

"Come along with me now, Aunt Critty. I will give you some good medicine dram, and you must sleep. Evelina wishes you to obey me. Come!"

The old crone left off singing and arose obediently and mutely followed her mistress.

Carolyn reached home and gave the old woman a narcotic mixed in some whisky, and then sat beside her until she fell asleep on the rug before the glowing fire.

Carolyn then securely locked the door and slowly went down to her lonely breakfast.

Old York suddenly rushed in, all panting with excitement, crying out, "O, Miss Car'line! De men done kotch poo' Sam down in de swamp; an' he had de berry knife in his breas' dat he kill Mars Gus wid, an' his clo's was spotted wid blood. Day dun bring him back here an' now all de white men in de country is goin' to take him out 'n' hang him fus' den shoot him all into rags! O poo' Sam! He wus always a good boy! a good, honest boy!" the old servant wailed, as he sank down on his knees weeping.

Carolyn turned pale and then sprang up. "Where are they going, Uncle York? Tell me quickly, and saddle 'Pluto' at once!" she ordered. "On your life, hurry! Hurry!"

"Dey is gwinter swing him up in de woods down dar, right back of po' Mars' Kendricks' house. I jes' cum from dar, an' de crowd wus already a-hollerin' out fur his blood! Po' Sam, he wus mos' dead! I seen him cum out de stable. Ole marster, an' all de gem'mens is dar!"

"Oh! hurry! hurry! Run and saddle 'Pluto'!" cried the excited Carolyn. "Oh! God! I may be too late!" she murmured. She hastily threw on her cape and cap, and then snatched up the carving knife from the table. The innocent man might be dead or dying on the rope when she reached there. Springing quickly into the saddle, she put the lash to "Pluto" for the first time in his career! He reared wildly up on his haunches in a wild surprise, and then sprang away, racing like the wind. It seemed that he only crawled along to the excited rider. She cut him again and again with her keen whip and urged him madly on. Her loosely fastened hair became

freed and it fell in a cloud of golden glory around her! Streaming out in the cold wind it smote sharply upon her face, and her cheeks reddened under the lashing of that golden veil!

The trees looked to be racing backward as she swept along past them in the mad ride for a man's life. She could even now hear the wild shouts and frenzied curses of the infuriated mob of lynchers! Black "Pluto" was reeking with white foam flakes as Carolyn dashed into their midst! All started back at the strange sight of the lovely messenger with her streaming locks of gold!

Poor Sam had said his last prayer on earth and was now just being hoisted up to the tree. He was a most frightful object, slowly strangling there, with protruding eyes and tongue.

Carolyn gave a sickening shudder as she raised her hand and shrieked. "Stop! in the name of God! This man is innocent!"

She did not wait, but rode up with a bound! They all gave way before the frightened, plunging horse. The girl drew out the knife she had caught up and cut the rope with one slash. The half-strangled man fell heavily to the ground. There was a yell, and then, womanlike, Carolyn fainted, reeling in her saddle as Judge Howard, Colonel Ashmore and Cleve Gordon sprang eagerly forward. They reached her side in time to receive her senseless form in their strong arms.

Dr. Blake quickly cut off the tightened rope from Sam's neck and raised his head. The poor slave gasped wildly for air, and Mr. McCay took out a flask from his pocket and then poured some whisky down the miserable negro's throat.

The maddened crowd stood morosely aghast; but their social leaders ruled without bodily interference as yet.

Carolyn soon revived, and, sitting up, said faintly: Oh! Uncle, did I come in time? Did I save poor Sam? Our old Critty it was who killed Mr. Kendricks! She has

been half-crazed ever since Evelina's death, and she lost her mind entirely last night!" And then, Carolyn told, in simple, tragic words, the whole story. The truth was written in her noble, resolute face.

Then Sam recovered, and, slowly crawling to his brave savior's feet, corroborated, in half-choked whispers, her simple story. He told how he himself had taken the knife from the gaping wound and why he had fled, to save being a witness against old Critty, Evelina's grandmother. With mutters of evident discontent, the crowd slowly dispersed, and Judge Howard took the grateful and overjoyed Sam into his protecting care. His dark face shone in an inspired tenderness as he kissed the slender hands which had saved him and bowed his head on the ground at her feet!

Her intimate friends all proudly escorted Carolyn homeward, to see the wretched old Critty, and properly dispose of her.

Julian Charles was in the midst of the crowd, but he did not go near her or the family party. He dared not trust himself even to speak to her!

Sam frantically begged to go along with them also, as he was terrified at heart, and worn out from exposure and fatigue. He feared the revenge of the "poor white trash," who had run him down.

"Come, my poor fellow. I saved you, and I will buy you in, when the sale takes place," said the one who had ridden the noble race against Death. "I will have you care for my good 'Pluto,' the horse that brought me here in time to save your life. You must love him and be faithful for my sake!"

Sam wept for joy as he followed the crowd that escorted Carolyn homeward in a public triumph, for the popular tide turned easily!

Old Critty was soon examined by all the doctors of the town and adjudged to be hopelessly insane. She was

put into the hands of proper authorities for protection and the care enjoined by the law.

The unhappy Augustus Kendricks was laid away to his long rest in the old Kendricks family burying ground in the "Quaker cemetery," where the giant pine trees moan away the years, and the river flows on forever!

Soon after, a distant cousin came from another state, and with due celerity laid claim to the considerable property. He was a Mr. Morton, who was socially a great improvement on the dead Augustus, who passed away from the public mind and memory. His wand of power was broken forever! No one mourned for the brutal master, now a slave to Death!

Carolyn Howard bought Sam at the auction, as she had promised, and once more a broody quiet settled down over the little country town.

There was but one heroine in the whole vicinity now—the brave girl who had raced against Death and won! After the excitement of her last unhappy interview with Julian, followed by the shock of the murder, and the strain of the mad ride to save an innocent life, Carolyn Howard soon fell into a nervous fever. Her heart and soul were wearied! She lay in the sunny reading room day after day, with her devoted lover, Gordon, there beside her. His presence was now only a secret torture to her, and she longed only for solitude and peaceful rest! The wooer pleaded daily with her to fix the wedding day, and, so at last in sheer exhaustion, she promised that it should be arranged for June. So, when the roses came in, with the summer, he should also come and bear her away, a bride, to Europe!

"It will bury my old life!" she sighed as he joyfully thanked her.

Judge Howard had to return to Washington to take his seat in Congress by the fifth of January, and it was natural that the happy Gordon should bear him company on the journey. On the very last night of the old

year the friends all sat once more in the library together!

Mr. McCay, Dr. Dan, and Colonel Ashmore had dropped in for the usual rubber of whist with the Judge. For a happy hour they all lingered together and the judge read aloud "Ring Out, Wild Bells!" Tennyson's splendid invocation, in a most impressive manner.

Then, a feeling of silent sadness stole over each heart, for none of them knew what the new year held in store for them, and the dear departing old year had been kind and true!

"We will at least drink out the 'old' and drink in the 'new,' my friends," said the Judge, and he drew forth the card table and his pearl and ivory counters. Whereupon Carolyn and Cleve Gordon, quietly withdrew to the parlor to hold their loving midnight watch alone. The wine and toasts would come later, when the happy bells rang across the snow. Now was the time for memory to hold full sway! There was the promise of all the realization of a life's happiness in the coming year to one. He waited for the first chime of the midnight bell to clasp his bride-to-be to his heart, in the year that was to make them one forever! And Carolyn sadly watched the glowing embers and thought of the ashes of Life! She dared not tell her affianced husband that in the coals she saw the face of Julian Charles, who was then blankly gazing into the flames far away from her and counting the last moments of the dying year! Every moment sounded a knell to his cherished hopes!

"I have lost her forever! This is the Death in Life!" he gloomily cried, as he rushed out into the dark shade of their garden, alone, heart chilled, in the dreary night! But, a star of Hope gleamed unnoticed far above him, even though its silver rays struggled through a darkening cloud!

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH YORK PROVES A WILY AMBASSADOR!

As the four old cronies sat wreathed in soft clouds of fragrant Perique tobacco smoke they did not very much resemble the cherubs of artists' dreams! They were eagerly intent upon their favorite card game, blowing rings and feathery curls of smoke aloft, and only casting comical glances of triumph when one of them neatly trumped his opponent's coveted trick.

Presently a knock came at the door, and it slowly opened.

"Well, gem'mens, is you all ready fur de punch?" queried a familiar voice. It was the discerning York!

"Why, York, you confounded rascal, how did you know that I was here? and how did you come here? I'll swear that nigger's got the gift of second sight!" And then Colonel Ashmore put down his hand and stared at York, who was shaking with triumphant laughter.

"He! he! he! Why, Mars' Henry, don' you tink I'se up to all your tricks by dis time! didn't I see you lef' off yo' white cravat an' bes' hat? an' I sez to myse'f, 'Mars' Henry ain't gwineter see Miss Ma'y t'night; he ain't said nuthin' to me, but I knows he is up to a game of cyards at Mars' Jedge's, an' day will need er punch. Wid respec' to you, sir, I knows your Jeff dun-no how to make er Scotch punch, an' you'ns, sho' do know how to drink it! so, I jes' ups and take shanks's ponies an' trotted ober here!"

"Come in, come in, York! You are a very Solomon of wisdom!" laughed the delighted Judge. "And it is true that no one can brew a better punch than you."

"It is dry work, this playing cards, without a wee

drap to wet your whistle!" chimed in McCay, beaming his approval over his cards.

"Look here, York," cried Dr. Dan, "it is a pity that there are not more darkies like you—it is your duty to your country to get married and rear up sons for us! Make your match now, and I will officiate at every birth and stand sponsor at every christening, and not charge you one cent. Now, there's a grand offer!"

"Go off, Mars' Dan! What you givin' me! Don' you know Becky is de only wife for me? an' she done pass' de noon-day sun! No, Mars' Dan, dere's 'nougn niggers in de lan' widout any ob mine. Dey do say dat great mens neber leabs great sons; look at Mars' George Washington!" and then he shuffled out of the room, leaving the four cronies convulsed with laughter.

When they were all well warmed up by the punch, and felt the delightful tingle in their blood that a comforting libation gives, they were far more careless of their game, and soon began to spin their easy yarns.

They had for years guyed the crafty McCay about his experience with the bulldog Towser, and now Colonel Ashmore had a good one on Dr. Dan, and for McCay's sweet revenge he openly recounted it to the general delight.

It seemed that Mrs. Dan had been greatly annoyed by mice in her pantries, and, so, begged the Doctor, who was going into the country, to look about for a fine mouser for her. He had taken dinner with a patient three miles in the country, and had casually mentioned his need of a cat, and the old lady graciously presented him with one of a famous old stock—it was an immense yellow Thomas! When Dr. Dan went to mount old Derry, his professional gray nag, he had the cat under his arm, and Derry, craning his neck with a knowing look, decided that the Doctor had a very fine pumpkin and that he would take a bite! so he reached around and slyly grabbed the astonished cat out of the unsuspecting

Doctor's arm! With an unearthly yell of fear and pain, and a mad spitting out of anger, Thomas struck out nobly with his long claws, and fixed his sharp teeth into old Derry's nose and lip. With one frantic snort the horse reared and was off in a jiffy, leaving Dr. Dan sitting on the roadside, dazed and speechless.

The cat was gone in a trice! the horse was soon out of sight! and so poor Dr. Dan had nothing left to do but to follow on foot on the long, muddy three-mile walk home. When he reached there he was puffed up and red, he was suffering from anger and cold, which was not mollified to see "Derry" standing contentedly in the stable yard. The fierce Thomas, however, was not visible!

Mrs. Dan met her irate spouse at the door with open arms, crying, "Well, Doctor, where is my cat?"

"In hell, I hope!" was the Doctor's laconic reply. For the grimalkin had stirred his soul to its fathomless depths.

McCay fairly danced with glee as they all shrieked with laughter.

"I am deeply indebted to you, Ashmore," he cried, shaking his hand vigorously. "Now, Daniel, my lad, only say Towser to me again, and I will ask where is that yellow cat?"

"Laugh away, laugh away, friends! It is better to laugh than be sighing," said the Doctor dryly, as he acknowledged the "cat."

They drank out the old year right royally, and, at the stroke of twelve, Judge Howard arose, they following his example, and drank to each other's health and happiness in the new year.

"Here's hoping, Dr. Dan, that the birth fees will be plentiful enough, without adding to your own list at home, and that you will never have to meet the 'yellow cat' in the tropical place to which you consigned him!"

The Doctor bowed his blushing thanks.

"McCay! here's to your happiness—may the little

brown jug never grow empty!" And McCay solemnly bowed his acknowledgments.

"Ashmore! Here's hoping that this coming year may usher in the lady of your dreams as ruler at the Hermitage! And the same to you, the same to you, York!" cried the Judge, and they all drank these toasts deeply and shook hands all around in the grip of an unbroken friendship.

Meanwhile, Carolyn sat in the parlor beside her affianced lover. She was in a most melancholy mood. She had just sung "Ah! those pleasant days are gone," and "Twilight Dews," and had, at last burst into tears and put her head down on her folded arms on the piano rack.

Her distressed lover tried to draw her to his breast. "What is it, my beautiful love? Here is the one place to shed all of your tears!" but she gently resisted him and only allowed one slender hand to rest trembling in his, and then, he stole his arm tenderly around her waist.

"You are unnerved by all the tragedies of the past week! I wish that you would return with your uncle to Washington," he said anxiously. There you will forget all these strange happenings. It is a wild, hot headed clan down here!"

"No! no! not for anything! I will get well and strong as soon as the gentle spring days come in. I need silence and loneliness to rest my nervous system. You know that I will have so much to attend to by and by, with my trousseau gathering on hand. The summer will be here before we know it! Time flies faster every year, I think."

"It will seem a century to me, Carolyn," sighed Gordon, stroking her splendid hair gently; but, I also have much to accomplish! I must find a fitting home for my darling one, and it must be filled with all beautiful things! Do you think you will ever be content away from your old Southern home, Carolyn? Will love be enough in the new life?"

"I may, in time, Cleve; but it will be very hard, for I am a true-born Southerner, and I have loved my old home here so dearly! However, we must spend a part of every year with uncle. Promise me this!"

"The future will easily arrange itself, dearest. Whatever comes will be guided by your happiness. I will always consent to your own plans. Yes, at any cost!"

Carolyn made an effort to shake off the lowering clouds that still would enwrap her, and so, she laughed and chattered away brightly, after her April shower of tears. She was secretly seeking to divert her lover and to escape his ardent caresses.

Julian Charles' mad kisses still haunted her—her lips were tingling yet from them. When she closed her eyes and thought of the rapture of that wild embrace, the hot blood would bound through her veins! She felt like shrieking aloud his beloved name, though Fate had banished him. For, her awakened heart was clamoring now!

At last, the tall grandfather's clock on the stairway chimed the midnight hour, and then all of the bells in the village rang out a joyous welcome to the new year! Their pealing was wafted far away over hill and dale to the listening ones at Sunset Manor. Cleveland Gordon arose and then clasped a glittering diamond bracelet on Carolyn's firm, white wrist, and drew her down to his breast, whispering softly, lovingly: "Wear it, darling, as a token of the eternal bonds that will soon unite us. May this new year be as bright for you as these gems; and may our love be like this little circle of gold—endless!"

She felt guilty as she yielded to his kisses, and, yet, returned his tender New Year's greeting.

They were soon joined by the gentlemen, who insisted that Carolyn and Mr. Gordon should drink one cup with them to the happy New Year, and, with jocund merriment, they all drank together, and then bade each other a warm good-night. The tide of Time had turned again, and the dead year veiled its ashen face.

In a few days, Carolyn was left alone at Sunset Manor and was free to brood in silence and think of the future calmly as she might! But all seemed to be a mere huddle.

She felt like a child at play who had erected a beautiful castle of blocks, and then ambitiously piled it up too dangerously high; the last block finishing the shaky tower made it all totter and fall to ruin! She realized that she could never be heart happy with Cleveland Gordon. The man she respected and admired, but she could never love him. And yet, she had pledged her word to be his loyal wife and she gloried in the knowledge that a Howard never broke the plighted word—their proudly borne motto was "Faithful Unto Death!" and, it had always been worn in honor.

She had not seen Julian Charles since that last stolen interview, and she now carefully made a hermit of herself to avoid him! She did not wish to have another temptation flung across her path!

But, a change soon came over the lonely Carolyn! She grew strangely sentimental, a weakness which she had hitherto scorned in her vigorous youth. She became fond of reading Moore's poems and would pore over his simple melodies for hours. There were echoes ringing in her heart. She practiced long upon her harp and seemed a veritable St. Cecilia, as she sat sweeping its chords, and singing, "Believe me, if all those endearing young charms!"

She chose the twilight hour in which to wail forth, "O, the heart that has truly loved, never forgets!" and her tears marked the closing chords. In these days of unrest the stately Hebe began to lose color and grow thin. It was unmarked until Maud Hastings, who called one day, noted the change; and, she artfully said to Julian, later: "It is well that Carolyn Howard is going to be married soon. She is quickly losing her last pretentions to beauty,

and, even now, she looks positively old maidish!" It was an insidious cut!

Julian merely smiled incredulously, and ventured, "Perhaps Miss Howard is only pining to see her lover! I have heard that fashionable young ladies often lose color when they are in love; but, I have not noticed such symptoms in your case, Maud!" he added, teasingly. Every one knew that Mr. Morton was deeply smitten with the charms of the handsome brunette. He had his newly-gotten wealth and he was an accomplished gentleman.

The wise Maud had accepted his attentions graspingly, as she realized at last that longing after Julian was simply longing for the unattainable. The lawyer's heart was not to be caught on the rebound.

It was during the gardening season that old York went over with some offerings of early peas for Mrs. Charles to have planted. He found her busily engaged directing the setting out of young plants in the front garden.

"Ef you please, Miss Ma'y, I wants a little word wid you in private," he said humbly, with a longing entreaty in his rolling eyes. He had a little spring scheme, one all his own!

"Why, certainly, York; come into the library." He followed her dumbly into the pretty sunny room, and stood there before her, hat in hand, and head bent down. The amused matron eyed him curiously.

"Well, what is it, York? don't be afraid to speak; you know I am your friend of old!"

"I axes yo' pardon, Miss Ma'y; but, do you know dat you ain't doin' yo' Christian duty?"

She lifted her eyebrows in sudden surprise, and smiled, in doubt.

"De good book says, 'lub one enudder'! Now, dere is Mars' Henry libin' a lonely life, an' he am soon growin' old an' feeble, wid nobody but me, a pore old black nigger, to take care ob him! He mout er had a wife an' a house full o' chilluns to enjoy; but he nebber lubed

but one 'oman, an' he has growed gray er waitin' for her. He has sarved two times as many years to git her as Jacob did to git Rachel, an' it is all fur nuthin'! Now, Miss Ma'y, I'se gittin' ole an' shaky, an' befo' I draps into de grabe, dat knows no wakin', I wants to see Mars' Henry happy, an' I wants to be happy too, dis chile does! You is makin' Marster's life berry dark, an' mine, an' pore Becky's too, for she ain't ebber gwinter say yes, tel you does! Miss Ma'y, for God's sake, don't keep Mars' Henry waitin' eny longer!"

It was a strange appeal—this petition of the simple slave.

Mrs. Charles sat dumfounded, conscience-stricken, and yet silent, throughout York's whole harangue; she listened, feeling one moment like laughing and another like weeping.

When he was silent, and waited expectantly, she then looked up at the drooping, woe-begone figure of the old negro, and sudden tears gemmed her dark eyes. She appeared lost in deep thought for a long while, and then she suddenly blushed as pink as a carnation, and slowly said, "Uncle York, when you go home tell Colonel Ashmore that I wish to see him this evening on important business! Now, go in search of Becky, and tell her that she must unpack her wedding dress from the great lavender chest, for I am going to try now to make some happiness for several people in this world!"

The happy slave trembled in a sudden joy.

"God bress you, Miss Ma'y! God bress you! an' crown you a bright, shinin' angel in heaben!" and then old York burst out in tears, and fell at her very feet, kissing the floor where they rested.

York silently departed and mounted the old nag, which Colonel Ashmore had given to him long years before. Never had whip cut the old favorite so keenly into flight as on that memorable morning, as he dashed away over the four miles of road to the Hermitage! Colonel Ash-

more and York were like two schoolboys as they rode back to the Anchorage that sunny afternoon. Both were dressed in spick and span new festive attire. The Squire sat, in state, in his carriage, with the happy York, mounted on his nag, in attendance.

The tender buds of early spring were beginning to swell on the trees, and the long delayed spring-time was also budding in those two faithful old hearts! While York went in search of his beloved dusky damsel Colonel Ashmore, with a wildly beating heart, lifted the brass knocker of the front door. He almost started back at its fateful sound.

He was soon ushered into the bright, cozy library, where Mrs. Charles demurely awaited him. She went forward to greet her faithful swain, but neither of them spoke a word. It was an eloquent silence which drew them tenderly together. Colonel Ashmore clasped the lady's hands in his own and gazed, in fear and trembling, upon the treasure which he had so long desired. Fate had so long denied him that he feared now to speak and ask the great boon again!

Mary Charles was a vision of regal loveliness—a Minerva, with the blushing face of a Venus! She was robed in some soft gray stuff and had a bunch of sweet violets fastened on her breast.

"Mary!" At last, the name struggled forth! "Is my waiting to end at last? Am I to win my crown after so long fearing the cross?"

He spoke slowly and tenderly. The tears of joy glistened in his honest blue eyes. It was a happy approach!

Mrs. Charles lifted her stately head and looked into the faithful, devoted face, and then slowly raised her arms and clasped them round his neck, saying softly, "Yes, Henry! At last, you shall wear your crown—you have been so patient and true, and I can no longer resist

your steadfast love; for, I also love you! And, you have proved yourself worthy!"

"Great God! can I be awake!" cried the Colonel, whilst happy, dancing stars floated before his enchanted eyes, and a choir of angel voices sang in his awakened heart. His strong arms hung helpless at his side, his eyes were fondly fixed on the sweet upturned face. "Do you mean it, Mary?" he gasped.

She felt like weeping, but laughed instead. "Do I mean it? Yes!" and then, she lifted her lips, tantalizingly.

Like an avalanche his kisses rained down upon her lips, her brow, her eyes!

He was in a dream of new-found happiness as he clasped her to his breast, and then seemed half mad with joy; for the strong manly nature was waking from its long sleep.

Suddenly upon the scene appeared the care-worn Julian. He stood still before them in a blank amazement, gazing wonderingly upon them.

Colonel Ashmore rushed upon him, and then embraced him, crying, "Julian, my boy, will you have me for your father? Come and give us your blessing! I have won my Mary at last!"

"Mother, is this true?" the son asked, going forward to clasp her hands.

"Yes! Julian, darling! I think that I have kept him on the rack long enough. Besides," and she shot him a merry glance, "I think that you need a father's care!"

Julian laughed and then kissed her tenderly. He fondly placed her trembling hands in the outstretched palms of the happy Colonel. "God bless you both, my children! I consent, fully and freely!" he cried mischievously and escaped from the room. But it was only to fall over old York and Becky, who were locked in each other's arms, weeping for very joy, in the passage behind the portiere.

"Great Heavens! and this, too!" shouted Julian, grasping his old nurse by the shoulders! "Well, I am surely de trop!" And he fled on through the front door, out into the park, feeling left out in the cold. It seemed to him as if the rays of the spring sun had advanced the time of roses—but the rose of all the world was lost to him forever! There was no sign of hope gleaming beyond these tender spring days! He sadly cried, "Turn back your dial, Time! Turn back to the dead happy days—gone forever! For there is only Hope's sad ghostly sister left to me now! The shadow sister who died too young, and whose name is—Memory!"

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT THE WEDDING TROUSSEAU BROUGHT!—ONLY A DREAM!

Spring comes early in the balmy South. The Southland is the one especial boudoir of the fair maiden who steals silently upon the glowing year, and she decks it with her brightest buds and blossoms, her gayest colors and richest hangings; she loves to linger there awhile and dream her waking dreams of love!

By April, the landscape around Sunset Manor was already glorious with tender greens, deep shadows and high lights. Bursting buds clung to almost every swinging bough. Every grim sentinel pine tree was now trimmed and festooned with yellow jessamine. The dogwood opened its white stars all through the green forests, the wild azaleas blushed in the lonely swamps, and water lilies glorified the streams.

The crab-apple trees were now all tricked out in pink array, as if for some festive occasion, and merry birds

by the thousand lifted up their voices and sung and cooed love notes amid the branches of the trees.

All nature seemed to revel in a dream of love, that would soon deepen into that splendid languor of passion, the throbbing heart of summer.

For miles and miles, one could breathe in the ecstatic perfume of the jessamine and apple blossoms, for Nature there delights to swing her censers and waft her pure incense to the blue heavens.

Myriads of minnows darted among the cool grasses of the limpid streams and everything seemed buoyant.

The singing woods were full of life and joy over this resurrection of Nature, the unrevealed Goddess of all!

Carolyn Howard, who had grown strangely thin and pale, seemed also born in a new life, for as spring slowly advanced the warm young blood danced through her elastic veins, the wild roses bloomed once more on her cheeks, and the starry jessamine shone in her eyes; the sunbeams were tangled in her gold bronze hair, and the girl's rebellious heart, so long held in check by the hand of pride, now beat strong and true for her only love, Julian!

She would mount her "Pluto" and ride far away, dashing for hours through the forest roads, feeling so young and joyous, simply because of the spring time and the young blood in her veins! She would gather the graceful trailing vines of yellow jessamine and twine them around her hat, and around Pluto's neck, and, truly, she looked a sylvan goddess, queening it in her own forest realms.

She had seen Julian several times, but they were never alone, and, with prudent avoidance, she had never conversed with him since she bade him "Go" and never speak to her again. She now feared to meet him, and he proudly bided his time to justify his loyal past.

Carolyn and Nina had both visited the happy Mrs. Charles to congratulate her on her engagement, and,

later, they had also attended the quiet wedding in the little ivy-covered rock church, where the beautiful matron and Colonel Ashmore were made one—at last! There had been a rousing reception at the Anchorage, where the bride and groom received the congratulations of their hosts of friends. Carolyn was a guest there, coming with her uncle, but she did not speak with Julian alone. He was here, there and everywhere—seemingly as gay and happy as a lark! The Colonel had insisted that their honeymoon must be spent at the Hermitage, and so he bore his bride away in triumph, leaving Julian to keep bachelor's hall alone at the Anchorage.

York and Becky had been united the day after the marriage of their master and mistress, and they gladly went with them to their beautiful country home. Never were there happier souls on earth than those two faithful slaves, who not only rejoiced in their own happiness, but also in the knowledge of the perfect peace and contentment of Colonel and Mrs. Ashmore, their kind master and mistress. For their humble lives were intertwined in the gray and gold of their beloved superiors.

Carolyn received daily letters from her betrothed in far away Washington, and, as the Judge was often away from home, she had ample time and food for reflection—an introspection in which shadows of the past fell over her young heart.

In early May a great pioneer box came down from the city, containing a part of Miss Carolyn's trousseau. With her old black mammy's help, she unpacked it in the solitude of her chamber and placed the dainty garments on her bed. The bridal dresses had not yet come; there were only heaps of soft linen garments, hand embroidered, beribboned and bedecked with rich real laces. When mammy had taken the boxes from the room, Carolyn locked the door and then dropped upon her knees beside the bed, and with her chin resting in her palms, she

looked in wonder upon the beautiful display. And she mused in silence!

The wisteria was blooming in purple billows around her windows. She could hear the droning of the golden bees busy now among the blossoms, and the perfume stole into her brain, yet she only thought of those filmy garments. She could have drawn some of them through her engagement ring and the embroidery was worthy the skill of Arachne! They seemed to be strange in their ghostly delicacy!

"What are they made for?" she asked herself absently, for her thoughts were wandering now.

"For your own wedding!" came the proud reply of her monitor.

"But why all of this beauty and richness simply because I am to wed?" she mused.

"They are for the eyes of your beloved to revel in! He alone will behold them and admire your beauty, half revealed by their filmy texture!"

And then a wave of crimson rushed over her face. It was repellant to her!

"And who is my beloved? Is it my betrothed husband? The man I have pledged my word to marry?"

Her monitor would not be silenced. "No, not he, but the one man on earth whom you could ever love; the absent man, whose eyes alone should behold your sacred beauty as a bride; the one man, in the whole world, whose caresses would not be displeasing to your soul!" And the stern monitor spoke the truth!

"And who is he?" came the half fearsome whisper of the mind controller!

"Julian Charles!" answered the rebellious heart, with a wild, glad bound and the blood rushed over her brain, and her throbbing pulses beat like imprisoned birds, striving for freedom. She could not lie to herself at the last! She buried her face in the soft garments and wept

in a bitter anguish. "I can not—O, God! I cannot give myself up to any one else!"

"Cara mia, you do love me!" came back the haunting voice! She felt again those electric kisses that still burned upon her lips. As Carolyn questioned her soul, alone in her room, the strange magnetic brain waves reached Julian Charles as he sat drifting far away in a boat, with his paddles lying at rest. The canoe was gliding slowly down the broad river. "Carolyn, Carolyn darling! I love you; I want you!" cried out his soul, and his heart beats pulsed strong and true, "Cara mia, Cara mia!" The message of Love's telepathy had thrilled him!

"I can not give you up to another!"

Oh! the memory of those soft, full lips; that warm, throbbing form, the panting breast that lay against him for one mad moment! He was transported beyond himself!

"O, Carolyn, you are mine! I must win you or die! I have endured and suffered enough! I have tried to forget, but the longing is too intense, the thirst and hunger for you is too great! Cara mia, Cara mia! You must be mine!" he cried in a great appeal.

His boat glided on down the river; the wind blew freshly through the young canes on the banks, making weird music, as if the great god Pan had hidden himself there to blow his olden magic sweetness through them!

In the western sky the sun was setting in waves of royal crimson and gold, and in the far pale east, a new moon arose from out the blushing clouds. As the tranquil east reflected the warm glow from the west, so the passion that stirred the heart of Carolyn was reflected in Julian's soul, and a whole universe seemed to lie between them, held so tenderly apart!

And, away in Washington, as Cleveland Gordon spent, with open lavish hand, his gold to adorn a stately mansion, he too thought only of the graceful woman who

would soon be mistress of it all. The star of hope was in his soul.

So it is in this little world! The rich man piles up his coveted gold, greedily, in his coffers, his garnered harvest, and takes the bread away from the poor man's lips! Every single joy that stirs our human hearts leaves some sorrow, sitting beside cold ashes, in another's aching breast! The mingled cup of joy and woe!

It seemed to Carolyn's tortured brain that she heard her loved one's far-off bitter cry, "O, Carolyn, Carolyn! I love you, Cara mia!" and then her beating heart answered, "O, my love, my love, I am coming! I am yours alone!"

She arose in haste and flung the dainty garments from her and caught up a large garden hat, wreathed with corn flowers and poppies, hurriedly placing it on her tumbled hair as she walked swiftly down toward the forest and knotted the white mull strings under her chin.

How spicy was the wafted breath of the friendly pine trees! how full of life-giving ozone was the sparkling air! Yellow butterflies chased each other in golden clouds above her beautiful head, and the heavy perfume of spring blossoms seemed to bear them up on invisible wings. It was a witching time! With bright eager eyes and flushed face, Carolyn went hurrying on deeper into the forest, her steps guided by some strange influence. She went down to the cliffs where the trailing arbutus clung in pink fragrance and beauty to the gray rocks that hung above a stream far below. And there she rested!

With a cry of glad content Carolyn flung off her hat, and picked the sweet sprays, with rapid hands twining them into a wreath. Their delicate perfume thrilled her, and an intoxicating joy filled her breast. It was a magic hour and her heart opened like a flower. She shook out all the wealth of her gold brown hair and let the amorous breeze play in its ripples, and when she had finished the

crown of arbutus she placed it on her head and her voice burst forth at last into happy song. She caroled gladly—

> "Bring flowers, bright flowers for the bride to wear,
> They were born to blush in her shining hair."

With quick steps, eager eyes and tenderly outstretched hands Julian Charles came quickly striding toward her.

She did not see him till he was almost beside her. "Carolyn, darling! I am here!" he cried in rapture. The song died on her lips as a startled cry came from them, and she lay in his arms once more! The spell was broken at last! Heart beat against heart, there, in mad ecstasy, and lips clung hungrily to lips in that forest temple. Faint and weak from her emotions, Carolyn sunk down amid the flowers on the rocks and Julian sat beside her, still holding her fast. "My own bride! Cara mia!" he whispered rapturously. "Say what you will, darling, but pride must give way to love! We can not live without each other; you belong to me alone, and I to you. It is our life, our love!"

"O, Julian, my promise! my promise!" she wailed, for the Howard motto rose up before her!

"Such promises were better broken!" he cried, impulsively, as he kissed her little hands. "God does not hear such promises, Cara mia! Give you up now? Rather would I give up life, heaven, eternity! No, darling! spirit hands led us to each other this day of days. You are mine by every law, human and divine!"

And Carolyn did not question it as she lay there on his breast in a supreme content!

It seemed to be their real union of souls, their marriage fore-ordained by God and Nature, with the birds singing there around them, the trees sighing love above and the yellow jessamine sighing out a golden song from perfumed wedding bells! How sweet, how beautiful was the dream! But, alas! it was only a dream. Only a dream!

A mocking-bird sat in the wisteria vines and sang, as if the spirit of the angel Israfel was imprisoned in its throat! For the slanting moonbeams stole into the room and touched the eyes of the dreamer, as she lay across her bed, crushing all the filmy laces and ribbons of her wedding garments beneath her. She suddenly started up crying, "Julian, darling! O, God! It was only a dream! a dream!"

"Honey," cried Mammy's voice at the door, and she rapped several times, waking the dreaming girl and dispelling the vision of Love's triumph. "Honey, ain't you gwinter wake up? Supper is all ready an' waitin' an' ole Marster is gittin' mighty impatiable!"

The dreaming girl awoke in the old world of care!

Carolyn slowly shook back the loosened hair from her eyes, groped her way to the door and then unlocked it.

"Come in, Mammy, I have been so sweetly sleeping that I am sure Uncle will forgive me for keeping him waiting," and then she lighted the lamp.

"Peek-a-boo!" cried a voice at the door, and pretty Nina sprang gayly into the room. Carolyn quickly folded her arms about her faithful friend. "O, you darling, I am so glad to see you! Did you come back with Uncle?"

"Yes, Cara mia! The Judge drove by to see Papa, and, as I was heart hungry for a sight of you, I invited myself and here I am! Am I welcome?" she pouted.

"As welcome as the flowers of May!" Then seriously, "I am truly glad, Nina, dear; for I am lonely and heart sick, and I sorely need some one to bear me company to-night!"

"For de Lord's sake, Miss Car'line, what you done to all yo' fine weddin' clothes? 'Fore God, youse been asleep on top on 'em!" cried the startled mammy in a sore dismay, as she approached the bed, in horror.

Nina pricked up her little ears at the magic words,

"wedding clothes," and then, with a cry of delight, flew across the room to inspect the wonders of muslin and lace that had been the cushion of such strange dreams upon this sunny spring afternoon.

"What a lucky girl you are, Carolyn!" cried Nina. "Now I am busy as a bee sewing at my own modest outfit, but it is such a labor of love to stitch away, happy in my dreams and fancies. There is magic, a weft of loving hopes, twined in the laces of my wedding garb. Philip has given me a gold thimble, and he patiently sat beside me for an entire evening, watching me draw threads and work handkerchiefs. Foolish fellow! he covered them with his kisses and was enraptured over the pretty initial 'H', which I put in the corners of them."

"Ah, Nina, dearest! you and Philip will be very happy, and you both deserve to be," said Carolyn, sadly, as she fastened the last pin in her hair, with an unconscious sigh!

"And will you not also be a happy woman, Cara mia?" the little bride-elect anxiously asked.

Carolyn smiled in Sphinx-like manner and did not reply. For she had passed the point of dissembling!

"Do you see much of Julian now, Nina?" she slowly said with averted eyes.

"Yes; he and Philip took supper with us only last evening. He seemed to be very sad at times, and yet would break forth suddenly into the wildest mirth. Philip says that his heart is breaking for you, dear. I fear it is only too true."

"Oh, stuff! hearts do not break nowadays, dearest. They do wear out in time, but they never break. That is a fancy of the blighted poet heart," laughed Carolyn, whilst her heart ached with anguish. "And what of Maud? Has she succeeded in lassoing Mr. Morton yet? I consider him quite within the danger line!"

"Almost, I think," laughed Nina, "they now ride out

together nearly every day. Philip thinks him to be really infatuated with Maud."

"Well, I wish her every joy and success! Come! let's join Uncle at supper. I am very hungry."

Together the pretty pair sauntered down and entered the long dining room, where the Judge sat waiting beside an open window, patiently reading the news meanwhile.

A large cut-glass bowl of lilacs and daffodils stood in the center of the table, and they filled the room with the sweet breath of spring. Old Jeff was just placing the tempting supper before him.

"You were not very anxious for your letter, little girl," said the Judge, as he kissed Carolyn and felt in his pocket for her daily love message.

"It will keep, Uncle, dearest, but, supper will not," laughed Carolyn. "Aunt Judy's muffins are regular towers of Pisa to-night. Come! they must be buttered while they are hot. 'Time and tide wait for no man', and neither do Aunt Judy's muffins!"

"By the way, Carolyn, I met Julian Charles in town this afternoon. He asked me to say to you that if you desire to send any package or message to Washington he would bear them with pleasure, as he leaves for there to-morrow on legal business. I don't know what has happened to tame Julian down so completely; he is so quiet and steady going now, that I think his career will be a great one. He is very popular all over the county and I expect he will be sent to the Legislature this fall. He seems to be cut out for a noble career!"

"I always knew that Julian would be a final success, Uncle," quietly answered Carolyn. "Pray, thank him for me and say that I have nothing for him to bear to Washington for me save my good will. Bid him goodbye for me, please!" And an awful despair settled down upon Carolyn's heart as she realized more than ever the sad difference between her love-painted dream of the

afternoon and the sad awakening reality of her life! For she knew that her own words had severed the last bond between them. It was not the loving heart now throbbing in her bosom, in sad unrest, which had prompted the bitter words falling from her lips. "Go! Go and leave me forever!" These harsh words were the proud utterances of that Howard pride which held her back! And he had taken her at her word! He had mutely obeyed her, and she wondered that night, as she watched the stars rising and sweeping over the west, if he was lonely in his onward and upward path! For he was now a rising star among men! "'The heart knoweth its own bitterness!'" she sadly murmured, and her heart conquered the Howard pride in secret, for her pillows were wet that night with bitter tears!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DUEL OF THE TWO LETTERS!

As the north-bound train sped along toward the great national capital a look of fixed determination was shining out upon the pale, clear-cut face of Mr. Julian Charles, counselor at law. A relentlessly aroused spirit looked forth from his eyes. The old Spanish blood was burning hotly in his veins, for he had now determined to settle, once for all, the great question. It was ever before him now! To whom should Carolyn Howard belong—to Cleveland Gordon or to Julian Charles?

He well knew that proud Carolyn Howard would never break her plighted word, even at the expense of breaking her heart! He had known her firmness from early childhood. It was too near the marriage day now to waste precious time in pleading at her feet; but he had in reserve other and stronger methods.

It was a different Julian Charles who stepped from the train as it stopped amid the bustle and confusion of the city from that wild-eyed, haggard, dissipated man who left there, conscience-accused, a few months before. A new-born soul breathed in his manly nature.

Then, he had given up Carolyn in despair and had decided to throw away his life and prospects in debauchery. A threat of social suicide!

Now, the strong, firm mouth and fearless eyes spoke of the spirit within that vowed to conquer or die!

After refreshing himself and changing his traveling attire he strolled into the club which he had frequented so often under different circumstances. He was hailed with a warmest welcome! Many old friends greeted him cordially, but, excusing himself from the game of cards in which he was pressed to join, he lingered there, smoking a cigar and chatting with several men about town, while secretly awaiting with impatience the arrival of his rival, Gordon.

"Say, Tulliver! does Gordon frequent the club as much as ever?" he carelessly asked a friend. "Yes," his friend replied, "he spends part of every evening here, but he seldom plays cards now, however; he is too busy trying to reform and is getting his 'palace' ready for that wonderful southern beauty, whom he is to wed next month!"

"By the way," added another, "you know her, do you not, Charles? Has she any 'rocks', or only beauty and wit? Is she really an heiress?"

"Yes, I have the honor of being one of Miss Howard's oldest friends; she has quite a fortune, I believe, and I know that it will be doubled at her Uncle's death. She is his only heiress, too!"

"By Jove! Gordon is a lucky dog, one of the 'silver spoon' babies! He was born to easy wealth, himself, and has never had to deny himself any gratification of pleasure. Now he has won, hands down, a rich and beautiful girl, one as proud as a Lady Lucifer, too, I am told!"

"Miss Howard has every reason to be proud!" said Julian firmly. "I find that in this life we must all, in time, learn the virtues of self-denial, and the lucky Gordon's time may come."

"Speaking of angels," said Tulliver, "here comes Gordon now." There were many curious eyes resting on the two rival lovers!

With a flushed face, Julian quietly arose and went forward to meet his quondam friend. "This is a surprise, Charles, and a most welcome one; when did you arrive?" cried the happy bridegroom-elect.

"Only this very afternoon, Gordon; you see I lost no time in seeking my old resort."

"I hope that you will not leave as many good dollars here as you did before, my boy," laughed Gordon.

"No, I did not come for fun or cards this time, but am in Washington on business of vital importance." There was a shadow on his brow as he spoke.

"I hope that you left all my southern friends well?" said Gordon, noticing his serious air.

"Yes. They are all quite well. I saw Miss Howard only a few days ago, driving through town. She was looking more beautiful, if possible, than ever."

The news of his beloved made the lover radiant. Gordon beamed with delight as he cried, "Come down with me to the theater, old fellow. There are several good things on the boards now. It will cheer you up a bit."

"Thank you, Gordon, but I am not in the humor for diversion of any kind to-night. This is, as I told you, a hurried trip of vital importance to me. Can you come down with me now to my room and give me a few moments?"

"Why, certainly, Charles, it will afford me great pleasure."

The two young cavaliers strolled down the street together. The night was balmy and serenely beautiful, and the lights of the great city threw clear-cut shadows on

the broad white pavement, making the moths that fluttered in the air cast grotesque shadows, like large birds tangled among the newly budded twigs of the trees.

Both men were silent, each busied with his own thoughts, until they reached the hotel. Charles ushered Gordon into his own well-chosen apartments. Gordon looked around the room with eager eyes and broke out, "By Heaven! I have cause to love this very room! Charles, here is where I wooed and won my lady Idalia! She sat just here in this blue brocaded chair, as she listened to me!" Gordon's eyes grew dreamy, and then his hands clung in a caressing touch to the indicated chair.

"Yes! I knew that Carolyn Howard had occupied these rooms. That is the reason why I took them," answered Julian softly, and before Gordon could prevent it, he slipped into the blue chair, and, pointing to one across the rug from it, said: "Sit there, Gordon; I fear that this interview will not be a pleasant one, but it will for all that be brief. I have something serious to say!"

With wondering eyes, Cleveland Gordon sank into the chair indicated and looked over at Julian questioningly. He began to wonder now!

"You do not know, perhaps, Mr. Gordon, that I have faithfully loved Carolyn Howard all of her life! We were little sweethearts, even as children, and fondly attached as boy and girl, and, afterwards, bound in a deeper love as man and woman!" It was a frank avowal of a lifelong claim upon the woman's future years!

Julian spoke dreamily and a deep, angry flush stole over Gordon's face as he listened.

"Why these reminiscences? Miss Howard is now my betrothed wife!" he said firmly.

"Yes, I know that, Gordon. A lie came between us and it parted us! A separation born out of pique and wounded vanity. Carolyn accepted your proposal of mar-

riage, but, only after the work of the slanderer had aroused her pride."

"Stop there! Julian Charles! I will never believe your story until it is verified by Carolyn Howard herself! I do not believe that she is a woman to accept a man's caresses unless she loved him! She is no coquette!"

"Great God! don't speak of those caresses to me, Gordon, else I will forget my manhood!" broke out Julian, hotly. And he rapidly continued: "Hear me out! Carolyn Howard loves me! ME! That I know. She has plighted her troth to you, and she will never voluntarily break her word. She glories yet in the legend that a Howard was never known to break a promise or given word, and she is sadly preparing to wed you, while her whole heart is truly mine! I came here, relying on your manly honor to act, as I could not dissuade her. I trust that, for her sake, and for yours, and for her future peace, you will release her."

It was a bold demand!

"You ask too much, Monsieur Julian!" cried Gordon defiantly, through his set teeth, as he rose and paced the floor. "You presume far too much! Carolyn Howard is destined to be my wife in less than a month! I love her better than my life, and I will not give her up to any man! There is my answer, sir!"

"And I also love her better than my life or heaven, and in spite of hell itself, Carolyn shall be mine!" Julian sprang up with flashing eyes and a stern, set face.

Gordon cried, "Take care, Julian Charles! Do not provoke me too far!" and then the two strong men drew nearer together and glared like hungry tigers into each other's hostile eyes.

"It is useless to be angry or to have recourse to bitter words; yet, however, we must prove the truth of this thing, and at once!" the affianced lover hissed out.

"That is just what I intend to do!" exclaimed Julian. "Here is ink and paper! You sit down and write to Miss

Howard now; I will do the same! She is a truthful woman, and, God knows that she would not stoop to deceive. If she acknowledges her love for me, will you then release her?"

"No! by heaven, no!" fiercely cried Gordon. "Not unless she, herself, asks to be released! I could win her love were she mine alone, my wife! my all!" His soul was bitter in its anguish.

"Write your letter here, at least, Mr. Gordon, as I shall write my own. You shall read mine and I yours! We will post them both to-night, and in five days we should have her reply, if promptly written. We will meet and open the letters together and each read the other's reply. Do you agree? It is fair and honest to God and man! Do you agree?" Julian implored.

"I do, since we each claim the lady. Your strange story must be either proved or disproved! I will meet you five nights from this, here, in the hotel corridor, and I will take you to the home I have loyally prepared for my bride; and there we will read our letters." Gordon spoke as a man reeling under a sudden fever attack. His air castle was fast crumbling to ruins!

Julian bowed acquiescence and said: "I am very sorry that future friendship is impossible between us; but any further general conversation is certainly useless at present. Come! we will write; there is just time to send the letters away by the south-bound mail to-night!"

They seated themselves at the table and wrote hurriedly; then, examining their appeals with piercing looks, they silently passed them to each other. It was a strange duel for a woman's heart!

Julian's read:

"Carolyn: You know that I love you, and since that last meeting between us, I am equally sure that my love is returned. Tell me, on your honor as a woman, if I am not right; and that you would only wed Cleveland

Gordon to keep your pledged word? A Howard never lies! My whole life depends upon your decision! Answer me, truly and at once. Yours, as of old,

"Julian Charles."

Gordon wrote in a manly and serious appeal:

"Carolyn, My Carolyn!

"I am told that you love another; the thought is death to me! Answer truly! Is your love mine, or does your life belong to Julian Charles? Do you wish our engagement ended now? Will a Howard break her sacred word?

"Yours in despair,

"Cleveland Gordon."

The letters were read with a silent bitterness and in an agony of doubt.

Then the seals were affixed to them without another word! There remained now but the ordeal of the answers!

Julian rang the bell and gave the letters to the boy, saying: "See that these letters get off on the ten o'clock south-bound train! They are most important; put them in the mail carrier's hand at the train and return here for your reward."

The boy touched his cap and ran down the hallway as the two men bowed icily to each other. Their strange duel was ended.

"We will meet in the lobby of the hotel, five nights from this," said Gordon, taking up his hat. His eyes spoke of the despair chilling his heart!

"Good-night, Mr. Gordon!" replied Julian, bowing low, and his voice seemed that of another. He, too, was lost to the present.

When he was at last alone Julian turned the key in the lock. He sank into the blue chair and buried his face in his hands,

"Ah! Cara mia! I can never give you up! Darling! your sweet body once rested in this very chair! It was here you foreswore your heart's truest love and gave yourself to another, and here I will teach him what your free heart reveals! It is the issue of life or death, Cara mia! I will sleep here to-night upon the same pillows your dear head has pressed, and I pray that you will come back to me in a dream. My own darling! My own!"

The five days of weary waiting were a long-drawn-out misery to the two unhappy men. While the agony of suspense brooded within their hearts they avoided each other; but Julian naturally met many loyal Southern friends, who introduced him to their own circle in the gay city. And had he been only on pleasure bent he could have captured the goddess of mirth herself. For it was an easy pleasure-loving Southern delegation.

In vain the bright-eyed beauties of Washington smiled upon the handsome South Carolinian, whose poetic eyes and soft voice thrilled their susceptible hearts. He was a sealed enigma. A Palmetto youth who calmly passed Love by!

He dined, he smoked, he talked, he merely existed through these five long days, counting the crawling hours. And, at last, the momentous evening came, when his life's future happiness was to be decided by the answer of the woman whose two lovers had honestly appealed to her, in the name of all womanhood! And both knew the faith of the Howards: "Bon sang ne peut mentir!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A LITTLE SHOOTING MATCH, "JUST FOR FUN." AND A SINGULAR TRIAL!

The rivals met at the appointed time and bowed profoundly, as they were noted by curious friends. They moved to the door and Gordon extended his cigar case to Julian, who politely took a fragrant weed and lighted it. Together they left the hotel, the best of friends seemingly. There were murmurs of curiosity.

"Will you honor me, Mr. Charles, by criticizing the frescoes of my grand salon? The house is all lighted up and all has been made ready for your judgment," said Gordon as a hotel page boy held open the door of the waiting carriage.

Julian replied calmly, "Certainly, with pleasure, Mr. Gordon. I only hope that my judgment will be of service to you."

Together they entered the carriage and were driven rapidly away. Both the men were moodily silent as they were whirled along through the brilliantly lighted streets of the city. Their heart-beats were almost audible, and a cold hand seemed to choke back their constrained voices. Their eyes were gleaming coals of fire! After awhile they were drawn up before a magnificent new mansion, most brilliantly illuminated, and it seemed that some one kept a vigilant outlook. As the carriage stopped the house doors were thrown open and a liveried butler sprang down the steps to open the carriage door.

"You are alone, Louis?" asked Gordon.

"Oui, Monsieur," bowed the little Frenchman.

"Then you may go for an hour. We need no atten-

tion now. Mr. Charles and I will inspect the decorations"

"Merci, Monsieur," and the serving man delightedly sought the nearest wine hall to enjoy a little Parisian gossip with his countrymen.

Gordon gravely ushered Julian into the beautiful salon. The rarest bric-a-brac, pictures, and statuary, the finest draperies, and richest furniture adorned the vast apartment.

Julian looked upon it in a genuine surprise and admiration. An honest pang of regret shot through his heart as he thought, "I would deprive her of all this wealth and grandeur; but, oh, Cara mia, love is best after all!"

The two men were deadly pale and deeply agitated as they turned their glances on each other's faces, and they each lifted their trembling hands and drew out a letter from their breast pockets. The perfume of Carolyn's favorite violets faintly appealed to the heart of each as they unfolded the creamy sheets in a deathlike silence. Julian's eager eyes read:

"Oh, Julian! Friend of My Childhood!

"Why do you ask me that question, when you know so well the answer of my heart! Yes! I do love you, only you! True, a Howard never lies! So I must answer your prayer from my heart, and yet know also that I can never be more than your friend.

"Carolyn Howard."

Cleveland Gordon was white as a statue and the veins on his brow stood out in twisted cords when he read the ominous words:

"Mr. Gordon:

"I am your affianced wife! Be content therein. I respect and honor you. I do not love you! A Howard

was never yet known to break her pledged word. So I will be your bride on the twentieth day of June, if I live to be claimed by you, and I will make you a dutiful wife. Until then,

"Yours in trust,

"Carolyn Howard."

The two men looked deeply into each other's eyes, as though striving to read his opponent's very soul.

Their breath came fitfully and great beads of moisture wet their chilled brows as they grimly exchanged the notes and read them eagerly. There was a pause of agony! Gordon crumpled the folded paper in his hand and cried, chokingly: "She loves you! Yes! It is true!"

Julian sighed a long sigh of intense relief and the color surged back to his face as he cried triumphantly and thankfully, "Yes! She loves me, thank God! She loves me, and would you now be so base as to hold her to the mad promise to be your wife? To the letter of the bond?"

Gordon's face was dark and threatening as he cried exultingly: "She will not withdraw her pledge, sir, and neither will I give her back her sacred word. She has acknowledged her love for you, but is loyal to me and to her duty. Once that she is my wife, she will soon give me her heart also!"

"What!" shouted Julian, with fiercely blazing eyes, "Do you now refuse to free this loyal woman? A woman who can love but one man! You know now that I am that man! Would you be so cruel, so vile, so low, as to hold this noble nature to a loveless union? Never! Never! You shall give her up!"

His voice was thrilling with a mad menace.

"I will die first," said Gordon firmly. "I flatter myself that I am perfectly competent to win and hold a good woman's love. And I will also know how to protect my wife's future happiness. Go, sir, go! and never

cross this threshold again. Never dare to speak to Carolyn Howard, who will soon be my wife!" Gordon was wild in his wrath!

"By God! she shall never be your wife, and that I swear! You brute! You deserve a dog's death! You would be a woman's owner; but I will give you a brave man's chance. There, take that!" And Julian tossed a loaded pistol down at Gordon's feet, and laid its mate upon the nearest table! It was a defiance to the death.

"Is it to be murder then?" sneered Gordon, picking up the pistol and examining it as Julian seized his own.

"No. We have perfectly equal chances! Are we not alone?" asked Julian fiercely. "Come now!"

"Quite alone! The servants have not moved in here yet. There is only my French valet, Louis, who is now absent. How do you propose to settle this affair, sir?" Gordon's nerve was settled now.

"You refuse to give up to me the one woman on God's footstool whom I love and who fondly loves me. I refuse to give her up also! It is clear that one of us two men must die for her sweet sake! We have each six bullets here; let us turn off the lights so as to have equal chances and then fire at each other until we both fall or fate decides our quarrel! Both of us are fairly good shots and it is not likely that both will escape. Come, sir, do you agree? Our chances are in every way equal!" And Julian's coldly glittering eye measured his rival from tip to toe.

"Yes! I agree that one of us two must die!" shouted Gordon, "and I do not propose to be that one, if I can prevent it. You are only a madman! It is very irregular, this duel of yours, but no one can interfere now. Come into the banquet hall. It is not yet furnished, and you and I can have a feast of blood uninterrupted. There will be no pictures or bric-a-brac to ruin, and no carpets to stain," he sneered. "Follow me!" cried the impatient man, who was now thoroughly aroused to taste blood.

Cleveland Gordon, with a firm step, led the way to the chamber where Death now waited for the prey of chance! Julian followed him with a lightsome tread, as if he were preparing to step in the stately minuet, instead of measuring off the deadly duel's paces! The unfurnished banquet-room was lofty and bare. An artist was even at this period busied by day on the ceiling frescoes, of smiling bacchantes, glowing garlands of grapes and rarest flowers, grotesque fauns, leering satyrs, and fancy cupids smiling at their pranks. The artist's ladder and all his scattered art materials littered up one corner and the paint was still wet on the sketched face of the sensual, smiling Bacchus.

Gordon closely locked the doors, and then turning to the lynx-eyed Julian, asked in bitter, suppressed tones: "Well, sir, what is the next act of this mad drama?"

"We will first turn out all the lights; then we can wheel about where we stand, count three, and fire! Keep up the firing until Fate decides the issue between us once and for all," said Julian quietly. His foe was no craven!

Gordon bowed a cold acquiescence and turned out the gas lights, leaving the room in total darkness. Then their harsh voices rang out fiercely, as a counter defiance, One! Two! Three! and then, two heavy reports rang out simultaneously, then came another crashing report, and a third time double shots deafened the room with horrible echoes. They were interrupted by some one wildly ringing the front-door bell of the mansion and as the fourth shots rang out in the darkness the sound of hurried footsteps was heard without, and a wild cry arose, "Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! Murder! It is murder!" and then, as Louis battered away at the strongly barricaded door, above his frantic clamor arose a sweet, full, woman's voice in a commanding appeal. "Gentlemen, open the door, for God's sake! It is I, Carolyn Howard!"

The two pistols fell noisily to the floor, and, still stubbornly defiant, Gordon turned on the lights, whilst Julian

Charles unlocked the doors, and he stood there guilty and abashed before the queen of his heart. For there had been the devil of murder loose within him! Never did two schoolboys look so foolish and cowed as the two hot-headed claimants for the fair woman who stood there between them, with her eyes blazing out a stern contempt and cold wrath. Her face was like a marble Athena's as she judged them coldly. Old Judge Howard stood there beside her, mopping his brow and blowing still with unvented excitement as he cried frantically, "My God, gentlemen, what does all this mean? Are you men both mad?"

"Did I not tell you, Uncle, that I knew those letters smelt of powder? I know Mr. Julian Charles' South Carolina manners: Coffee and pistols for two; it is his favorite luncheon!" she cuttingly said. "So I came here as a self-invited guest! Were you heroes trying to annihilate each other, and so leave me as a deserted old maid? Really, two corpses would not make very lively bridegrooms! I will now for once break the Howard pledge of honor! I will have neither of you. You are both madmen!" And the stately woman gazed with a haughty scorn upon her abject subjects, who stood there coatless and still pale in rage before her, neither lifting their eyes.

The terrified French valet, Louis, slunk away into a corner, with his eyes almost bursting from his head in excitement. He trembled in every limb with fear, until Gordon chanced at last to see him and dismissed him sternly, saying, that he and his friend were only amusing themselves in practicing target shooting in the unfurnished banquet hall. He bade the man not to speak of it, if he didn't want to be cut adrift and lose a good place. Louis fled from the room as he thought sagely, "Mon Dieu! but these wild Americans have a droll way of finding amusement!"

"Pardon such a strange reception, Miss Howard," said Gordon as he hastily drew on his coat. "Come! let us go into the salon, where we will at least find chairs. Allow me to do the honors." And Gordon bowed low before his regal Idalia, and cast a pleading glance upon her.

"Yes! Come!" cried Carolyn. "I will be your judge for once, and I must have this case tried before me now. Uncle James, you must be the jury, if you please, and I charge you to render a just verdict! I will abide for life by your decision!"

There was a ray of hope in Julian's gleaming eyes as he picked up his now useless weapons and thrust them into his pockets. He watched his peerless lady love sweep away from him down the long hall, and the determination to end his life if he lost her grew upon him. When they were all gathered in the beautiful salon, Miss Carolyn Howard seated herself deliberately on a corner divan and the three men stood there mute before her. The situation was a most ludicrous one.

"The court is called to order! Be seated, gentlemen, please," said the lovely young Judge. "Now, Uncle, I will state this case as I understand it! You have read the two notes which I received from these gentlemen. After I wrote the answers I took it into my own head that they meant mischief to each other. As you were coming here on business in a few days at any rate I persuaded you to come at once. We just made the train that bore my letters and arrived at the hotel before these gentlemen met, I suppose, for, see, we took our supper and then were told by a boy that Mr. Gordon had called for Mr. Charles in his carriage and they had just driven away to inspect the new mansion, as he overheard you, Mr. Gordon, say something about paintings to Mr. Charles." And she looked fixedly at the unhappy Gordon, who silently dropped his eyes.

"We followed you and heard the first shots fired just

as we arrived. Uncle made that bell-rope dance and then your little French jack-a-napes rushed up with a latch-key and at once admitted us! So you see, gentlemen, we were just in time to prevent your murdering each other!"

Judge Howard stared helplessly from one to the other, only saying, "God bless my soul! God bless my soul! What young lunatics! Bedlam is surely your place!"

"What have you to say, Julian Charles?" asked the sweet Portia sternly. "Dare you deny this?"

"You well know that after your written avowal of love, I would not give you up to any one, Cara mia," began Julian, who was interrupted by Gordon crying fiercely:

"And you surely would not expect me to relinquish a willing bride? Carolyn! you are my betrothed in the eyes of the world and I love you too well to give you up to another. You were willing that the marriage should go on, and so, of course, I also refused to relinquish my claim! This man failed to bully me also!" he sneered.

Judge Howard arose and cried excitedly, "You are two simple young fools; and so you undertook to murder each other, so that neither might get her? The same old story! Quarreling like two dogs over a bone! Shameful!"

"Now, Uncle! I won't be called a bone!" laughed Carolyn, determined to finish their humiliation; but she looked sadly nervous and blushes came and went on her fair face.

"Judge! you know now how the case stands," said Julian Charles. "I love your niece; I have always loved her, I know now that she loves me too—thank God! She has given her plighted word to wed Mr. Cleveland Gordon, and she will not break her vow! You know the foolish old legend in the Howard family. I will never consent to relinquish the supreme right that true love gives me over Carolyn, and neither will Mr. Gordon give her

back her troth. What are we to do? Is there no way out?"

"By Heavens! both of you can't marry her!" excitedly thundered the Judge, bringing his fist heavily down on a table, causing the scattered bric-a-brac to rattle, and then, he grew serious and turned toward his spirited niece.

"Carolyn! this is no child's-play! I do not approve of broken oaths, neither do I approve of loveless unions. You will have to cut the Gordian knot. Choose the lesser of two evils. I would not have you wed Mr. Gordon, an honorable man, if you have really given your heart to Julian. That would be insult as well as dishonor. Love is stronger than all spoken vows, and so, the jury decides, most unanimously, in favor of the heart—it alone must speak. So, Carolyn, let it speak out now!"

Gordon and Julian gazed with blank eyes upon the old orator, and both men were deadly pale as they slowly faced the agitated girl.

Her hands were pressed to her heaving breast, and then she glanced piteously at the unhappy Gordon.

"Mr. Gordon," she softly said, "I have tried so hard to love you. I thought it would be so easy, for I admire and respect you as a man of honor; but, love will not come at any one's bidding! A divine hand implants the seed in our hearts, and when it blooms it is the one thing eternal in this changing world! I love Julian," she faltered, and a great wave of scarlet swept over her beautiful face. "I never realized how much I loved him, until after I was your promised wife. And then, only then, I knew that I would never love any one else in this world or the next. So, you see, I was faithless to you, Mr. Gordon, in heart, and a faithless sweetheart would not, and could not, make you a happy, true wife. Your home is grand; your wealth is alluring; but, hear my prayer! release me from my vow; for I could never be yours at

heart! I beg for your grace." Every one in the room stood deathly silent—even their heart-beats seemed suspended. Gordon then pressed his hands quickly to his pale brow and staggered back aghast, as Julian, with joy-lit eyes, started toward Carolyn, but she stopped the excited lover by a glance of command.

"You ask for your release, Carolyn; I can refuse you nothing—not even to tear out my heart and cast it away, if it will make you happy;" the white lips parted as Gordon's head sunk down on his breast.

Carolyn burst into a tempest of long-repressed tears as she drew his hands from his eyes, and then lifted herself to kiss him gently on the forehead.

"Forgive me, Cleve! I feel like a guilty criminal now! One more boon I crave—promise to be my good friend, and Julian's also. Forgive him, for my sake!"

"Not yet, Carolyn. You ask too much of me now!" and then, he grasped both her hands in his own and gazed long and solemnly into her eyes.

He lifted one white, trembling hand, and then the other, to his lips, in a last adieu; he pressed hard, frantic kisses upon them, and with a groan placed them both in Julian's, as he turned and fled abruptly from the room. Caroline gazed sadly after him, with tear-laden eyes, as Julian drew her tenderly into his arms and sighed, "Poor Gordon! I could not be so magnanimous as he has shown himself. Cara mia, I could not give you up; rather give up my poor life!" and then he kissed her gently on the tear-wet eyes.

Carolyn raised her hand.

"Hush! Julian. Honor his manly grief! You must not speak to me now; you must be silent as to our future; it would be cruel to him. Go back home, at once, Julian! I will return with Uncle alone. We have no place here now!" The Judge sighed as he looked upon the many splendid evidences of Gordon's wealth and artistic taste.

"To think, Caro, my girl, what you are giving up for

that same fire-eating Julian!" he cried. For the happy lover had left them alone in the salon.

Carolyn laughed softly through her tears, and then answered him. "Uncle dear, Heaven itself would hold no charm for me were love denied the freedom of its portals; and, if I had come here as mistress of all this wealth, as Cleveland Gordon's wife, it would have been for me but a gilded prison; for love would never have entered these doors! And that discovery would have broken his heart!"

"Ah, well! Ah, well! It's a strange fairy gift, this same love! I will say no more. Love indeed is supreme and eternal. Come, little girl, let's leave this haunting house of fallen dreams! You have brought it neither peace nor happiness. I am sorry for poor Gordon. He deserved better fortune! It's the old story!"

In a few days society had a nine days' sensation to chatter over. Cleveland Gordon, Esq., had suddenly sailed for Europe, to be absent several years, and it was rumored also that he was to visit the Holy Land.

The grand, new mansion was barricaded and locked up in its unfinished condition.

Many of its art treasures were sent as parting gifts to Miss Howard, the lovely Southern belle, who had jilted him, so the story ran. The secret of the interrupted duel never leaked out, as Louis accompanied his wandering master, and he naturally believed his employer's version of the little shooting match; besides, he dared not to jeopardize a fine place by repeating it. He was paid, and well paid, to believe his master's slightest remark. And he loyally did, which proved the nimble Louis to be a Frenchman very wise in a foolish generation of busybodies. He had his doubts, but they were all smothered in the delights of revisiting la belle ville de Paris.

The club men missed both the lovers, and behind their plate-glass windows indulged in some surmises as to the flying trip of the beautiful Southern heiress, who was

vowed to be a dangerous coquette. But these surmises were prudently stifled, for it was currently believed that Julian Charles still was possessed of the pistols in working order, and no one cared for the coffee—with the fireworks attachment.

CHAPTER XIX.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL!

Julian obediently departed for the sunny South next day.

He was so supremely content gazing into the future that he did not even seek to see his accuser, Miss Carolyn, again; but he wisely left a mammoth bouquet of the choicest roses and a few heartfelt words at her hotel. The note was a prayer urging her early return to her old home on the hill.

Nothing definite was arranged between him and the old Judge; he only knew that Carolyn loved him, and before the golden summer was passed he knew that she would be his bride. He had so long endured suspense that the blessed certainty of the love of his sweetheart was joy enough for awhile—and he was forced to feed thereon.

It was dark when he reached the restful old Camden town which he fondly called home.

He at once went to his office to see if there were any letters awaiting him needing his professional attention, and he found Philip Hastings there, just putting his own papers in order for the night.

"Hello, Julian! Glad to see you back," he cried gayly, as he went eagerly forward with outstretched hand. There was the glow of victory on Julian's face.

"Philip, old friend, congratulate me—I have won the

race! The prize is mine!" said Julian with sparkling eyes.

"The race?" queried Philip, stupidly. "What do you mean? Have you been playing the races in Washington? See here, Julian, you promised me not to risk any money while away!" Julian laughed merrily.

"Couldn't help entering for this one race, Phil; the odds were against me, too, and so much depended on it, so I went it heels and head, neck and crop, and I won! By Jove! I won!"

"Explain yourself, Julian; I hope that you are not intoxicated," said Philip, seriously.

"Intoxicated? ha! ha! I should think so! Drunk, delirious, mad—with joy! Only joy, Phil! I have not looked upon wine, either white or red, nor yet the strong brown fluid!"

"Come, come, Julian; what is the matter? and why did Judge Howard and Carolyn depart so unexpectedly for Washington? Nina grieved because Carolyn did not even bid her good-bye! I hope there's nothing wrong?"

"On the contrary, Phil, everything is right, and Nina shall not grieve any longer. Tell her to be ready to welcome Carolyn home in a few days, and to have all her new rigging ready to dance at our betrothal feast! Yes, Philip! You needn't look so dubious! Carolyn has given up the senseless idea of trying to exist without me, and before many days have passed she will be my wife, thank God! That ends the story of my long waiting."

"Thank God, indeed! Julian, old fellow, I do congratulate you, from my very soul! And I will offer dear Carolyn my cheerful sympathies, too, at the first opportunity. Sit down now and tell me all about it." And then, Philip wrung Julian's hands joyously whilst big tears of joy brightened his honest blue eyes.

"I must be brief, Phil, for not only am I sane enough to be hungry, but I must ride out to the Hermitage at once. Mother will be so happy over my good news,

and the dear old Colonel, too, I know. I am impatient to tell them."

So they seated themselves, and Julian hastily recounted his coup de grâce to win the peerless Carolyn, and Philip applauded his artful methods and enjoyed every queer detail. "I may tell Nina, may I not, Julian? The dear little girl will be so jubilant, for she has grieved so, because she has always imagined Carolyn was not happy, and because she was destined to leave the South. Now, we will keep her always—God bless her!"

"Yes, Phil, tell her all; but no one else, mind you. Good-night, old fellow. I know I would have to gag and tie you down to keep you from flying to your sweetheart with this piece of news. Well, I would only do the same in your place. Good-night. Away you go, and Good Luck!"

Colonel and Mrs. Ashmore had just sat down to a substantial supper when the happy Julian rushed into the room.

"Julian, darling!" cried Mrs. Ashmore, starting up, and she nearly overturned the silver tea urn at her elbow as she rushed to embrace her happy-hearted boy. "When did you arrive, dear? How well you look! Upon my word, you are positively handsome; don't you think so, Henry?"

The Colonel critically examined the youth. "Bless my soul! Handsome? Why, my dear, Julian is your own son, and he naturally is like his mother! Welcome home, my dear boy, welcome! Sit down. Here York, get your young master a plate now, quickly. Well, how are you, Julian?"

And the genial old Colonel beamed upon his Mary's loyal son.

"I will try and answer several questions at once," laughed Julian. "Madre Mio, I arrived from Washington only this evening, and of course flew to your side. I am perfectly well, and moreover, supremely happy!

Hello, Uncle York! How are you, and how is Aunt Becky—the blooming bride?"

"Here I is to answer fur myself! Howdy, Massa Julian! It shuah is a sight good fur sore eyes to see you back home, honey!" and his old nurse curtesied deeply as she grasped his hand and beamed her delight upon him.

York placed another plate and chair at the table, and they were all seated as Aunt Becky hurried out to bring in the hot buttered waffles.

"Now, dear, tell us all about this mysterious trip of yours," said his mother, as she poured out the coffee.

"Mother! I implore you to let me finish my supper first; I am ravenous, and my news is too good to mix with any earthly food. It calls for ambrosia and the nectar of the gods!"

Mrs. Ashmore smiled and looked in pride and admiration upon her son, whose pale and usually stern face had melted into lines of laughter and happiness. A flush of triumph shone through the olive of his cheek.

When they had finished their gay little supper they went into the parlors, and Julian drew his mother into one arm upon his breast, whilst he threw the other across Colonel Ashmore's shoulders, as he said tenderly:

"Now, guess, my dear ones, what is the very best blessing that could befall me?" The seniors smiled at each other in silence, then the Colonel spoke emphatically, "A good, true wife." And he beamed upon his own recently acquired treasure. He was speaking from experience.

"True! And who is best fitted to be my mate? My own, noble, beautiful wife?" eagerly queried the elated Julian.

"Carolyn Howard!" they answered simultaneously; for coming events cast their shadows before.

"Then congratulate me, for I have won her!" With a cry of joy his mother turned and threw her arms around

his neck, and the Colonel patted his shoulder and almost wrung his hand off.

It was the crown of the arch.

"Bless my soul! I thought I could never be surprised at anything again, after my Mary accepted me; but I find that I can be! I say with all my heart, God bless you both, my boy, and make your life as happy as mine now is!" And out came the famous bandanna, and the Colonel gave one of his trumpet blasts known of old.

When they all became more rational, Julian told them of all his experience in Washington, and how he had at last won his crown of rejoicing. He concealed a bit of his bloodthirsty tactics in deference to his mother's peaceful ways.

One week later, Carolyn and Julian's betrothal feast was celebrated most grandly at the Hermitage, which place no longer deserved its cognomen, but rather should have been rechristened "Elysium Bower." It was a nest of happiness.

Colonel and Mrs. Ashmore had turned the immense hall and rooms into sylvan glades.

The huge fire-place, where the Yule log had been burned, was filled in with an aquarium, surrounded by rare and graceful ferns. Delicate vines twined the posts and framed the cheery old English inscription above the mantel-piece.

It was the feast of roses!

Every nook and corner was transformed into mimic lovers' bowers. The happy, ardent hearts of Colonel and Mrs. Ashmore now beat in sympathy for all true sweethearts. A feast that would have made even old Horace weep for joy was spread out in the long banquet hall; and the laughter-bringing wines, pressed from the luscious grapes of merry France, sparkled in flagons on the sideboard, inviting all to "come and taste, and let joy flood your hearts!" There was a bowl where vanished joys danced around the brim. Old York had brewed a

mammoth bowl of his rarest mint-julep "for de rich buckra,"and one for their carriage drivers, and the other assembled negroes to "drink de healt' an' happiness of Massa Julian an' Miss Car'line Howard." The host and his stately wife received their guests with a cordiality which warmed the very soul, as carriage after carriage of the county aristocrats drove up and was emptied by the waiting ushers. There was truly a gathering of lordly men of mark, and lovely women of rarest beauty.

Nina hung upon her Philip's arm just as happy as possible here below, and she looked a very snowdrop of purity in her thin white robes. Her inward joy in the coming union shone through her tender brown eyes into Philip's loving blue ones. Dr. Dan and his own better-half, Mr. McCay, Mrs. Hastings and Maud, escorted by Mr. Morton, were also in the splendid circle.

Judge Howard, with an aristocratic aunt of Carolyn's, who had come from New Orleans to direct the impending marriage, were central figures. And lastly the regally beautiful betrothed bride, clinging proudly to Julian's arm, stood in the hall and received the loving wishes and congratulations of their familiar friends. The very air seemed to throb with happiness.

"O, Caro, darling, to think you will not have to leave us! What joy!" cried Nina, as she tip-toed to kiss her stately friend. "The old tie binds after all."

"No, Nina, dearest; I could not make up my mind to desert this merry home circle, nor our dear old Southland, and so I decided that I would have to take Julian after all! A case of Home Rule!" she added, with twinkling eyes.

"Thank you for making me the means to attain your end, Cara mia," her lover laughed gayly.

As he strayed off with her to admire the decorations, he asked tenderly, "Why wait at all, darling? I have already waited all my life! All of our good friends are now

assembled here, the feast is spread, and instead of our betrothal this should be our wedding night."

"And so cheat me out of my orange blossoms and point lace? No! I thank you, sir! You selfish man! Why, we will have a real wedding in the church under a marriage bell of white lilies, while Mendelssohn's Wedding March is played by a whole orchestra! And there shall be bridesmaids of beauty and gallant groomsmen to attend us! The crown of the feast must be a mammoth bride's cake with a lucky ring hidden in it, and I will have everything that a bride should have—

> "Something old, and something new,
> Something borrowed and something blue."

One does not marry every day!" and Carolyn smiled up tenderly upon her chosen one.

"Well! I should devoutly hope not! but often the knot is tied more than once. See how happy my lovely mother is with number two! But, Cara mia, will you not still allow the twentieth to be our wedding day?" he asked, anxiously.

"No, that would seem cruel to another! Let me see, this is the twenty-sixth of May; I will consent to celebrate our marriage on the fifteenth of June!" The words were smothered on her lips as Julian kissed her, crying, "My queen! I thank you for the blessed assurance of those words!"

"Julian! You surely forget yourself! Why, Mr. McCay saw you!" and Carolyn blushed a deep scarlet.

"Poor little Scotchman!" laughed Julian; "he will realize more than ever what he has missed! But come, sweetheart, I want to show you something!" and Julian then led Carolyn away to the library and drew the curtains from the window, where she had hidden that memorable night on which she had banished him forever.

"Come darling, now, and take another lesson in as-

tronomy!" he pleaded, as he clasped her to his rapture-filled heart. "Here is Venus!" and he kissed one of her fringed eyelids down—"and this, must be a twin Venus!" and he fondly kissed the other. "And here is a grand constellation of heavenly beauty!" And he pressed long kisses to her mouth, her face, her hair and to her snowy throat.

Blushing and trembling with joy, the young astronomer lay in his arms there unresisting, and steeped in a trance of delight.

"O, darling! think of the torture of those stolen kisses of the past, and the contrasting heavenly bliss of these!" he cried. "Then I thought never to win you for my own —and now, you are mine, mine forever! Thank God!" And she learned her lesson in astronomy very thoroughly during the next few moments!

But they were not allowed to linger studying their fate in the clouds! Supper was announced and Mrs. Ashmore was sent in search of the truants. With an arm around each of her runaways, she led them into the banquet hall, amid general applause. Carolyn and Julian sat at the right of the hostess, whilst Philip and Nina were beside Colonel Ashmore at the other end of the table. And gayly the cup of joy passed around. Every heart was happy there; no death's head, with its direful reminder of mortality, disturbed that festive board. Only mirth and joy reigned, and wit flew from lip to lip.

It was old York's duty to pour out the wine offered as libations at the shrine of Hymen, and watchful to his trust, he did not allow a glass to get empty.

Toast after toast was proposed and drunk. As the wine began to warm up the blood of Dr. Dan, who had already, in company with his three boon companions, sampled York's mint-julep several times, he waxed duly hilarious, and lifting his glass aloft, cried, "A toast! a toast! For the perpetual happiness of Carolyn Howard

and Julian Charles in their united lives. May all your troubles be little ones!"

The lovers grew rosy red, but they were forced to join in the roars of laughter that followed.

And the courtly Colonel Ashmore made it worse by shouting:

"Just like your selfishness, Dan! Always thinking of your profession!"

The gentlemen enjoyed these olden sallies immensely, although Carolyn did not dare lift her eyes, and Nina blushed in sympathy with her. But the beards wagged merrily in the hall!

"York!" cried Mrs. Ashmore, assuming a stern manner, as the old slave trembled.

"Yes sum! Miss Ma'y," and then York spread out his arms like a cock about to crow, and doubled himself into a bow.

"No more wine for Colonel Ashmore!"

"Yes sum, Miss Ma'y," he cried, rolling his eyes in pity upon his ex-master.

"Bless my soul! Mary, my dear! Why, I am only beginning to get a little mellow!"

"But, my dear Henry, this is not a drinking bout, and the julep is yet to come!" his fair helpmeet decreed.

"Didn't I warn you, Ashmore!" cried McCay, solemnly; "I follow the blessed St. Paul's advice, and yet am the most enviable man at this table. I never had a wife in the days of all my life, and no one to say me nay!" he gayly sang, the exulting bachelor.

"O, sour grapes!" cried the captured Colonel Ashmore, beaming with pride and love upon his own lovely tyrant.

"York, bring in the julep; one round more! We don't have a betrothal feast every week, and there's only one Carolyn in the world."

"Now, Julian! A toast from you!" cried the Judge, benignly; "we have all had our say except the most

honored man of this festive occasion!" All eyes were turned to the lover.

Julian arose with brightly beaming eyes and placed one hand fondly on Carolyn's shoulder; he lifted his crystal glass aloft with the other, and said, tenderly:

"I drink to Love! To that eternal, divine, deathless Love which has united us twain! To Carolyn, my bride to be, and to each and every friend now here present! I wish you all happiness as perfect as that which now thrills my soul! May our symposium forever be dedicated to Love! Eternal Love! Joy bringer and Life-giver!"

They all lifted their ringing glasses and drank as in a dream of past joys and future delights. Carolyn then turned and clasped fondly the hand which rested on her snowy shoulder.

Before them all, Julian stooped down and kissed the lips of the one woman in the world for him. It was the harvest-time of Love—the love whose course had never been smooth till now.

They were now happy, the long-tried lovers, fenced in by gathered friends to watch the two happy reapers there, standing side by side, reaping with glad hands love's golden harvest.

As the winds moved the bending forest branches, where the dark trees clustered beyond, far away, side by side, slept the two unhappy slaves whose mystic curse of birth had followed them to their tragic end! All of the promise of their glad youth came to naught. Only a Harvest of Tares!

In the old "Quaker cemetery," near the victims of a nameless social crime—in mute oblivion, awaiting God's judgment, the haughty planter, Augustus Kendricks, slept. His stormy life had yielded but a Harvest of Tares!

In the betrothal feast, the central figure was Judge

Howard, the courtly and honored representative of the best type of the Southern planter and public leader. With all his gathered friends around him, with his lovely niece now happy at heart, he felt with a pang that his whole life's return was only a Harvest of Tares! Even the Congressional honors were barren; for he had no son to succeed him, and the honored name of Howard would disappear when Carolyn became the wife of Julian Charles!

THE END.

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